

Misery Business

by writergirl2003

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Summary: There were intimate truths between them that none of them were quite able, or willing, to accept. Amber. Corny. Shelley. Link. Collab story with Theatrics! Heavy language inside!

1. Let's Take It From the Top

****Tracy: ****Yay! A new story! A little bit, okay, a lot different than what I usually do, but it's all good. This project is something that I know means a lot to both Kelsey and I, and I know we're going to work really hard on it. I will, of course, still be updating "I Never Promised You A Rose Garden," so don't worry. I write for Amber and Corny in this story, as if you probably couldn't have guessed. Anyway, here's the beginning, hopefully there will be an update soon! I have a feeling this one's gonna be way dramatic, and as you can see, it's rated M, though probably only for language and themes, things like that.

****Kelsey Rose****: Hi, theatrics here. I like to appear and disappear at whim, as you could tell, but, anyway. Tracy and I have been wanting to write a story like this for a long time now, so it's really exciting to finally be able to. Yes, it's a collab, so that means we both write it together at various parts in each chapter. I'll just go ahead, leave all the mystery aside, and say that I write for Shelley. I write for others, as well, liiike a certain ladies' choice who has yet to appear and little Miss Brenda. But, that's about it for now, or, all that really matters. Yep. Hope you enjoy! XOXO.

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>"She is such a slut," Brenda whispered venomously to Shelley as she chewed vigorously on a fresh piece of gum. They had just gone off the air for a commercial break, and the Council Kids had all broken off into their groups to chat with one another.

"I know," Shelley echoed Brenda's assertion with a sneer in Amber Von

Tussle's direction. She wasn't paying them any attention. Good. "I don't see why she thinks she can get away with wearing that virgin pin. I mean, really. She's got a lot of nerve, don't you think?" Both of the girls giggled viciously to one another; however, neither of them succeeded in taking notice to the fact that Amber had long since turned her head towards the conversation. She wasn't deaf, after all.

"I don't believe that nonsense about her mother being the one who got her the lead dancer spot," Brenda crossed her arms over her chest and leaned closer to Shelley. The redhead rolled her eyes at the mention of the Von Tussles.

"Of course not, Brenda," She replied as though it were the most obvious thing in the entire world. "She's screwing around with Corny. Isn't it obvious?" Shelley groaned in exasperation at her friend's lack of rationality. Brenda shifted uneasily where she stood, and Shelley quickly caught her mistake. "Ugh, you know what I mean," She waved a hand sharply and dismissively. Shelley didn't care about Brenda's various and recurrent flings with Corny Collins; she knew about those. She knew just how easy her friend was, and so did virtually everyone else at Patterson Park High. It was only news if someone like Amber Von Tussle was thrown into the picture.

"Oh," Brenda let her arms fall to her sides as she popped her gum. "Yeah, right," She smirked suddenly, as Shelley pressed her lips near her ear.

"Why do you think she's always falling down?" Her voice was still loud enough for someone several feet away to still hear. "She's so used to having her legs up and spread apart," She snickered cleverly. "It's no wonder she's always complaining about muscle cramps during rehearsals, right?" Brenda gasped, and then joined Shelley in giggling.

"I'm not surprised," Brenda reached for a can of hairspray and promptly smoothed down a section of her hair before she began spraying it. Shelley's eyes wandered as she waited her turn with the hairspray can at Brenda's mirror. Her pale eyes locked unexpectedly with a very peeved-looking Amber Von Tussle. Shelley knew that expression all too well. The way that her eyebrows furrowed, and her nose and forehead wrinkled: Amber made things far too obvious when it came to her emotions, at least, as far as Shelley was concerned.

Shelley smirked and quirked an eyebrow at her. She wasn't about to make any assumptions, but her intuition told her that Amber had heard every last thing she had just so smugly whispered to Brenda. Well, good. More power to her. After tipping her chin upward slightly and sneering to Amber, she turned on her heel and received the can of hairspray from Brenda. Amber was clearly still fuming, but that wasn't her problem, because, by the time she finished spraying her hair into place again, the cameramen called time.

Forty seconds just wasn't enough time for them to stage what they both knew was coming.

After the show ended for the day, and everyone had cleared out, Shelley stayed behind, like she did on most days. She was gathering her things in her purse when a soft, yet stern hand gripped her

fiercely on the arm.

"What the hell is your deal, Shelley?" The person snapped, hurt obviously a huge part of the undertone of their voice; although, only Shelley would have been able to notice it.

"What?" Shelley turned around and propped her hands on her hips.

"Don't cop the innocent act with me, Shelley!"

"Oh, get over yourself, Amber," She rolled her eyes and draped her large purse over her shoulder. "You know it's true. Don't act like you're some saint."

"Me?" Amber scoffed at the words, tossing her blonde head back in sheer annoyance, "Dear _God_, Shelley, are you kidding me? I'm not acting like a saint, and I'm not telling you to treat me like one. I'm telling you to stop spreading _shit_ behind my back, especially to that whore Brenda. You know she's the easiest one of all of us; she has _no_ room to talk. She's only doing it because she thinks she'll win you over and won't have to sit alone on the bus anymore," Amber placed her hands on her hips, shooting Shelley an ugly sneer. She lowered her voice, bringing her head closer to Shelley's, "I know you get off on bitching me out, but I'm telling you to keep my name out of your mouth around her, and stop acting like the spoiled little bitch that you are, you got that?"

Shelley couldn't help but smirk inwardly to herself. If anything got her off, it certainly wasn't that. However, that was the farthest thing from her mind at this moment.

"You're just livid because you know it's all true," She bared her teeth. "How can I spread rumors when they're _true_, Amber?" Shelley kept her eyes narrowed as she eyed the other girl. She was doing everything within her power to sway her reactions away from jealousy. "You talk about Brenda like she's the only victim, when, at the end of the day, you're the one on your knees," She said cynically, suddenly resisting the urge to just turn and jet out the stage door. She was growing weary of this conversation; it was making her physically and mentally sick.

"Ugh!" Amber sighed, doing her best to act disgusted with her, though it was clear that a damaged ego played a large role in this confrontation. "Don't start your holier-than-thou shit with me, Shelley," Amber paused and sneered pleasantly when she saw that her comment had clearly reeled Shelley's attention in. "You, of all people, should know that it's not like that with Corny and me. Just because we get along doesn't mean I'm screwing him, Shelley. You've been hanging around _Brenda_ _far too long if you think every relationship has to involve some sort of sexual release to be successful, or even existent," The irony of Amber's words was not lost on her, and she averted her eyes, letting them gaze down at her white pumps.

Shelley laughed spitefully.

"Oh, _please_, " Shelley moved her purse from her shoulder and tossed her sweater on at lightning speed. "I'm not mental, Amber von Tussle," She rolled her eyes again. "I'm sure you have one hell of a

time fucking around in his dressing room. I've seen you walking in and out of there almost every day. I'm not as oblivious as you think."

Amber froze, an indignant pout motivating the corners of her lips to turn downward.

"God, you wish that were true, so that you'd have yet another pity party to throw for yourself, don't you? You just wish I couldn't keep my hands off a single person who walked by me so that you could sleep at night knowing that these pathetic little lies you're spreading won't come back to bite you in the ass," Amber knew she was being hypocritical, but she couldn't pretend to care right now. The deadly glare that Shelley had caught Amber in caused her to bite her tongue, to avoid saying anything further. She didn't exactly know how Shelley knew about her and Corny. She'd gone to great lengths to preserve their privacy, and avoided bringing his name up in any type of daily conversation. She kept her eyes averted from his during the show, never made any unusual or suspicious gestures towards him. In fact, she avoided him at all costs, if only for this specific reason, because she knew what would happen when she finally admitted to the fact that Shelley knew her just as well as she thought she did. Maybe even better than Amber knew herself.

Shelley stood there, no longer hiding how pissed and frustrated she was with this whole exchange. She hated having to talk about Corny. She hated having to discuss this with her when it was the absolute last thing she wanted to talk about. And she hated how small Amber made her feel. That was what really got to her. The fact that someone, aside from herself, could build her up and then break her down so quickly, made her absolutely furious.

Amber stood watching her, unsure of what exactly to do. She knew Shelley was angry; it didn't take an idiot to figure that out. Her brows were furrowed, mouth and forehead crunched slightly. Amber crossed her arms over her chest, staring nonchalantly at her, desperate for her to see that she could hold out all night. Desperate for her to realize that she didn't need Shelley to forgive her for this; even if it may have been true.

Both girls were silent for what seemed like hours, until Shelley stepped forward and jabbed her finger into Amber's shoulder, smirking. Amber stumbled back slightly, her pale eyes raising to meet Shelley's as she made direct contact with her. She narrowed her eyes into slits, hissing quietly at her as Shelley stepped closer.

"You know, jealousy isn't very becoming on you, Amber," She chuckled threateningly, her hand moving to grasp onto Amber's wrist as she pressed her lips directly adjacent to her ear. "You don't have to make your desire to have me all to yourself so obvious." Within a few seconds, she had her pressed against the wall near their dressing tables with her teeth grazing the skin of her ear teasingly.

Amber's breath caught in her throat and she sighed involuntarily, her eyelids only half open as she glanced around to see if anyone else was backstage. The rest of the council had gone already, of course; they had no reason to stay. They had families and pets and homework to attend to, but Amber didn't. All she really had to attend to right now was Shelley.

"You couldn't handle having me all to yourself," Amber promised her quietly, keeping her head tilted so that Shelley's lips stayed at her ear. "I'm too much woman for you, Shelley." She smirked, knowing her previous statement would elicit a reaction from the girl.

The redhead looked at her derisively, and then pulled back from her.

"You think you're such a prize, don't you?" She asked her, a sarcastic tinge to her voice. "Well, you're in for a bracing reality check," Shelley swore to her, her expression morphing into another look of contempt.

Amber abruptly turned her face to look at her, her lips dangerously close to Shelley's, a seductive smirk slipping across her lips, "I'm sorry, babe. It's just not gonna happen." She let her eyes meet Shelley's lips, and sucked her own lower lip in slightly, chewing on it to refrain from completely ravaging the girl. She curled her fingers into tight fists and leaned closer to the redhead. "But, maybe we could work out a little compromise."

"Compromise?" Shelley stayed true to her previous expression and gazed at Amber, issuing a silent challenge to her. Letting one of her hands slide down the length of the blonde's neck to the center of her chest, she gripped for the collar of Amber's dress swiftly, and then glared. "Not on your life," She whispered scornfully to her, just before turning on her heel to leave her there.

Amber watched her go, and didn't bother to call for her. There was no point. She knew Shelley; knew the taste of her lips and the pitch in her voice. She knew, as well as anything, that this would blow over. Knew that one of them would end up on the other's doorstep early one morning or late one night, begging the girl to take her, and without fail, one of them would. This would result in swollen, tired lips, aching muscles, more physical pleasure than Amber had known existed. It was a morosely beautiful dance they shared, and it kept the other coming back for more, always.

Amber rolled her eyes mockingly as the studio door slammed behind Shelley, completing her fantastic exit, and she shifted her weight, pausing for a moment before turning on her heels to return to her vanity. She gathered her supplies, shrugged her purse onto her shoulder and turned sharply, her blue eyes narrowing as she made her way through the hallways of the backstage area, slipping soundlessly into an empty corridor, pressing her back against the door and shifting so that her fingers rapped gently on the entrance to the room.

She waited a moment, holding her breath as she heard shuffling inside the room, and when he pulled the door open, her blue eyes met his. She kept her steely gaze focused on him, and he slid the door open further, allowing her to slip into the room undetected.

"Corny, I need to-" she began to speak, and stopped. His fingers traced over her forearms, and she clenched her jaw, suddenly unable to shake this incredible guilt that plagued her at the thought of Shelley's words.

"I know," he answered her gently, his fingertips now pressing against the edge of her jaw, tilting her head up to look at him. "Are you

going to stay here with me for a while today?" His voice was so soft, so incredibly comforting that Amber couldn't even pretend to care that she knew he was fooling around with Brenda, probably more of the council girls. She couldn't pretend to care that she knew that by his words, he was implying something else. Yes, company, but only of the physical kind. She would only stay until he was spent and sweaty, and she would leave as soon as her knees stopped trembling. That was the only thing Corny could offer her; a few moments of pleasure for a lifetime of pain. Still, she was in no position to deny him. He was wanting her, and she needed to be wanted.

"Yes," she answered him, though she wasn't completely sure why. "I'm going to stay."

2. It's Easy If You Do It Right

****Tracy****: Ahh yay! I'm so excited to be updating, I'm totally loving this story, and it's going to get way intense. Nothing better than writing with my favorite girl about my favorite girls! I hope you guys are enjoying this so far, I'm having a blast writing it. I love our somewhat tragic characters. Anyway, I don't really have much to say, so, enjoy!

****Kelsey Rose****: Blame the late update on me, folks. I just got finished with a production this past weekend, so I was swamped. That, coupled with a concert yesterday, and sudden sickness, hasn't helped. Buuutâ€¦ tonight proved to be a very inspirational one. So, yay! I'm happy.

* * *

>Two weeks later, things were back to normal, and yet, everything had changed. Brenda had discovered that she was pregnant, and, in turn, Velma had not-so-subtly told her that there was no place for her or her growing stomach on the show. Though it had been a surprise, it hadn't come to any of them as a particular shock. Brenda had been tempting fate for far too long with her careless ways, and it had only been a matter of time until one of the morons she was sleeping with managed to knock her up. The thing of it, though, was that it wasn't just *some moron* who had managed to do it; it was Corny.

Naturally, Brenda's empty position had garnered a large crowd of girls who wanted to audition, and, for whatever reason, Corny had chosen that Turnblad girl, and Amber believed that the entire show was now on its way to Hell in a hand basket. She had already captured the attention of Link, and the girls were less than happy about her sudden intrusion. Amber could pretend to care, and sneered and whispered horrible things behind Tracy's back, if only to keep up appearances. She knew that her relationship with Link had been over for quite some time, and she was too caught up in her relationships with Shelley and Corny to care about losing what little was left of his affections.

It wasn't to say that Amber was heartbroken over the fact that Corny had impregnated Brenda. More than anything, she felt slightly betrayed. Yes, she was involved with Shelley and Corny at the same time, and didn't feel a particular devotion to either of them over the other, but this was an entirely different matter. Corny was

attached to her now, whether or not Brenda kept the baby (which Amber highly doubted she would) and he would always have that. Brenda would always refer to him as 'the man who ruined her life' or something to the like, and what did that leave for Amber? A man who had impregnated a teenage girl and succeeded in getting her removed from his television show, that's what. An old man who wasn't ready to mature despite the fact that he was at least twice the age of the students on the show. That was definitely _not_ what Amber wanted to spend her nights with.

The studio had been abuzz with the news of Brenda, and Amber had barely had a chance to talk to Corny about it. Not that there was going to be much _talking_ going on, at least not on her side of the conversation. She had been sleeping with him for over three months now, and never _once_ had he discussed Brenda, or his relationship with her. There had been no doubt in her mind that he was sleeping with her; Brenda made that painfully clear to everyone around her, and Corny went through no great lengths to hide it, either, unlike his relationship with Amber. When she had once questioned him about the brunette girl, he had simply told Amber that she was his _favorite_, and that she didn't need to worry. He had appeased her, if only for the moment, and she had accepted his words as an easy truth.

Tammy and Lou Ann couldn't seem to get enough on the topic of conversation. At lunch, Amber found herself immersed in the world of Brenda and Corny, in their whirlwind 'romance', and the latest rumors they'd heard. Unlike Shelley, neither of the girls seemed to pick up on subtle clues, and seemed to have no idea that she and Corny were actually involved. She laughed sardonically with them at Brenda's misfortune, and joined them in calling Corny a pervert, a cradle-robber, sometimes worse. She found no shame in calling the man one thing behind his back, and sighing his name lovingly to his face.

On the day she had confronted him, however, she had told herself would not falter. Amber refused to back down from this inevitable confrontation that would occur between them, and had no intention of allowing him to lull her into a false sense of comfort again. That had worked one time, and she had vowed that it would be the last. Amber Von Tussle was no idiot, and she would _not_ let herself be treated like one.

She had caught him by the arm after the show one afternoon, managing to avoid the suspicious glares of the council members and making a conscious effort to dodge Shelley's gaze. Her fingers had brushed the elbows of his suit jacket, and he turned his head to look at her, his blue eyes catching on hers.

"We need to talk." Her voice was cool and collected; she had practiced it to be just that way, and kept her gaze steady on him. He nodded twice, wordlessly taking her hand and leading her to his dressing room, her fingernails consciously digging into his palm as they walked, remaining silent until he had closed the door behind them and turned to look at her, watching her somewhat remorsefully as he stood.

"Were you going to tell me?" She knew that her words may be taken as slightly defensive, but she wouldn't pretend to care. She dug her fingernails into the sides of her hips, locking her gaze on him. She

wanted to say more, but knew that an excess of words would make her seem suspicious, or even desperate, so she pursed her lips together, bringing her eyebrows and nose into a crunch that she was sure made her look all the more intimidating.

"Of course I was," his voice was smooth and soft, even in the face of confrontation. He moved slightly closer to her, his long fingers moving up to slide over her shoulders, then the back of her neck, rubbing the muscles there. She shrugged out of his touch, glaring at him with icy cold eyes.

"Don't _touch_ me," she spit at him, "I'm _not_ going to end up like _her_."

He seemed slightly put-off by her sudden withdrawal, and crossed his arms over his chest then, watching her with raised eyebrows as if she were a child having a temper tantrum.

"Okay," he allowed her to push him away, and then shook his head slowly, "You're not going to end up like _her_, Amber, I can promise you that."

She shook her head hatefully at him, keeping her gaze narrowed.

"You can't promise that. You can't promise _anything_, Corny. All you can do is make someone feel good for a few hours, and then kick them down from that pedestal you've put yourself up on." She flicked him away with her fingers, taking several steps away from him. "You get off on taking advantage of teenage girls; making them think they're beautiful and then throwing them out with the trash. That's sick, Corny. That's fucking pathetic."

Corny's eyes flashed suddenly, and he closed the space between them, letting his hand reach out to pull gently at a lock of her blonde hair.

"No," he chided her gently, shaking his head slowly, the corners of his mouth turned into a serious frown. "No, Amber, that's not it. You've got it all wrong."

"Do I?" She challenged him, her eyes glistening, "Because I seem to know you pretty damn well."

"Not well enough, apparently," he was closer to her now, his hands cupping her face, "You're different from them, okay? You're different from Brenda, or any of the other girls, Amber."

"Different?" She laughed the word, throwing it back at him, "And what makes me so different?"

"Because," he answered softly, his gaze locked on hers, "You don't need _me_ to make you beautiful. You're beautiful all on your own."

She scoffed loudly at him, using her hand to slap his fingers away from her.

"_Please_. You expect me to believe that? There aren't enough shovels in the world to clean up all of your bullshit." She hissed the words at him, her eyes sharp as daggers. "I'm not a complete idiot, Corny."

You think I don't know that I'm not the only one that you fuck around with? How many of us are there, huh?" She pretended to count on her fingers, and he watched her calmly, sighing softly as her voice rose. "Let's see— now that Brenda's out of the running, what's that leave, four, five of us?"

He sighed exasperatedly, rolling his eyes melodramatically at her.

"No, Amber."

"What then?" She demanded sharply, moving forward only enough to poke a fingernail against his chest, "More?" She sneered at him, her lips curling in disgust. "Tell me, you asshole."

"Amber," his voice was gentle enough to calm a stormy sea. He reached out for her hands, and she struggled against him for a moment, his fingers curling around her own finally, encasing her hands and holding them gently. "Amber, listen to me. It doesn't matter, okay?"

"It does matter!" She felt the tears burning the back of her eyes, narrowing them into watery slits. It mattered to her, though she would never say those words aloud. It mattered that he whispered those same sweet words into the ears of multiple girls, mattered that he touched them in the same way he touched her, gave them the same pleasure he gave her. It mattered, whether he realized it or not.

"No, it doesn't," he soothed her, succeeding in pulling her closer to him, his arms now slipping around her slender waist, holding her while she seethed in his embrace, her face burning red with indignation. "And you know why it doesn't matter?"

She didn't answer him; she refused to answer him, or to give him any clue that he was slowly gaining the upper hand in this fight, and turned her face away from him, her lips unconsciously slipping into the pout that she had become famous for.

"It doesn't matter," he urged her on gently, "because none of them are as special as you are. None of them have what we have, okay? They're just time-killers, that's all they are."

She kept her face away from him, clenching her teeth together. She hated this; hated knowing that he was slowly winning this battle, and that nothing she could do or say now would stop that from happening. She hated knowing that just beyond this door, Shelley was standing, though not necessarily waiting or expecting her, just there. There, where she knew that even the tiniest part of her heart was, right out there with her. Still, she couldn't give into that nearly overwhelming desire to tell him that, or to say that she wanted him to be hers and only hers, because she wasn't completely sure that was what she wanted. She simply wanted to know that he would be here, when she needed or wanted him, and that she wouldn't have to fight her way through a mob of girls to get to his dressing room.

"Time-killers?" She echoed his words, "Is that what I am, a time-killer?"

"No," he corrected her quickly, shaking his head, "I just told you, no. That's what they are. That's them, not you, Amber."

She didn't try to struggle from his embrace now, and lifted her head, letting their eyes connect.

"What time are they killing?" She knew it was perverse, ridiculous, even, to allow herself to be treated like this. To know that she was only one of many, and that she was no more special to him than any of the other girls. Besides, Amber was involved with Shelley as well as with Corny, and she was more than just a time-killer. She was, in fact, more of a time-filler. Amber found herself seeking Shelley out at least a few times a week, desperate for that contact between them, even when it turned out to be less than pleasant.

A tight smirk pressed across his lips and he lowered his head, letting his lips just barely brush her temple.

"All the time I can't be with you," he almost whispered his reply to her, letting himself gaze into her icy eyes, "There. Are you happy now?"

She kept her gaze locked on his, and let him brush his lips against hers. She closed her eyes, let herself surrender to the man that she had vowed never to touch again; the man who had single-handedly brought down the force field she'd surrounded herself with. She felt his fingers reach up to tangle in her hair, already beginning to pull the bobby pins from her golden strands, and she didn't resist him.

He began to drag the zipper at the back of her dress down, silently pushing the dress from her smooth shoulders as his mouth found the hollow spot at the base of her throat and began to kiss her there lightly. She wanted to tell him no, that she was anything but happy; she had, in fact, never been unhappier in her life.

"I hate you," she whispered the words to him, even as the tips of his fingers pressed against her jaw line and his lips traveled up the soft skin of her neck, finding their place just below her earlobe.

"You don't," he answered her gently, his breath tickling her ear, "You could never hate me." They were exactly the same words she'd heard from Shelley once before, and the almost distant memory left goose bumps running over her skin, a cold, empty feeling encompassing her suddenly.

She opened her mouth to protest, and his lips crashed over hers, capturing her in a deep kiss before pulling back and letting his fingers slip down her body.

She sighed his name and let herself pretend that this was the way it was supposed to be.

* * *

>Shelley had actually debated following Amber into Corny's dressing room, just to prove that her suspicions weren't faulty. In spite of this, something held her back. There was this sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach that told her not to go there, that she was

better than that. She wasn't about to walk in on what she presumed to be a 'tender' moment between that man and Amber. Shelley rolled her eyes and crossed her slender arms over her chest. Amber could continue her child's play in bed with him all day for as much as she cared.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Link, waving off some of the other Council Girls and walking side-by-side with that new girl, Tracy Turnblad. The sight of those two together made her stomach churn. Link had seriously lowered his standards to the point where Shelley was almost insulted. She narrowed her eyes and cringed at how that girl was smiling and talking so intently with him. For someone so new to the show, she really hadn't learned her place yet.

When at last Tracy left Link, Shelley pursed her lips and scoffed. Link caught her threatening stare and casually wandered over towards her.

"Why do you look so pissed?" He asked frankly, his voice showing just how little his interest in her answer was. Shelley almost laughed. For such an alleged heartthrob, he was certainly ignorant, but she had always known that.

"Your vision must be seriously disturbed," She replied sharply, her blue eyes rolling in disgust. Link raised an eyebrow at her. He thought quietly to himself for a moment, and then smirked somewhat.

"God, Shelley, I always knew you were the jealous type, but this is just a little sad," Link brushed his fingers over his hair, smoothing down one patch of it. Shelley narrowed her eyes even further and curled her fingers tightly against her arms.

"Larkin, watch your mouth," She hissed lowly, her features dark with contempt. "If I were jealous, a beached whale wouldn't be my first choice." Jesus, she hated boys. They were so juvenile and ridiculously obnoxious. If they would just use that organ two or so feet past the space between their legs, perhaps they would be more practical for Shelley's taste.

Link kept himself from rolling her eyes. He wasn't like her. However mature she thought that she was, he knew better. He wasn't about to act like a child just because she was. After all, she did break up with him, not vice versa, and, to him, that said it all.

"You are so completely predictable, Shelley," He sighed, exasperated. "You and Amber both."

"Do not compare me to her!" Shelley retorted, a certain fire rising in her eyes. Link stared at her, a bit put off. He shook his head, considered his words carefully for a couple of seconds longer, and then leaned closer to her.

"All right, Shelley, I get it. But, do us both a favor, and just shut up for once, and listen to me for a second, okay?" Link shot back, causing Shelley's eyes to widen in an angry and surprised fashion. She was about to pitch a pissy objection, but he stealthily grasped her by the wrist and put his lips near one of her ears. "She'll bring good ratings to the show. You and I both know that that never hurt anything," He paused, smirking. "Shelley, we've been here longer than

most of the Council, we know what rakes in the cash at the end of the day. So, a girl like Tracy may be it; just grit your teeth and bare it."

"Don't pretend like you're so smart," She glared, swiftly yanking her arm away. "I'm not a moron, Link. I know what Corny's trying to prove here," _because he obviously didn't bring _her_ on the show to sleep with her. _That was just downright disgusting, and Shelley shuddered at the thought of it. "He wants colored people on the show, and, I don't know, I guess that starts by someâ€¦| _fat_ girl taking over," She shrugged her shoulders, and Link frowned. He paused for a moment, and then looked at her seriously.

"Do you _honestly_ think she's any competition for you?" He asked, and Shelley's mouth hung open for a few seconds.

"_Of course _not_," She snapped, obviously offended. Shelley knew that her only real competition was Amber, but she wasn't about to go around admitting that, or anything. The other Council Members knew. They weren't blind to the constant fights that the pair of them had. "If anyone should be worried, it should be the Von Tussles, for obvious reasons; Corny, for inevitably condemning his whole show to hell; and _you_, for fucking up that so-called flawless reputation of yours by associating with that _thing_, girl, or what the hell ever."

Shelley and Link shared a heated stare for what seemed like hours with neither side giving up. His lips seemed permanently turned downward, while her nose and forehead were scrunched up angrily into a scowl.

"And you would know all about 'bad' reputations, wouldn't you, Shelley?" He said menacingly, a glare, for the first time in this entire conversation, settling on his features.

"Don't start with me," She knocked three of her fingers roughly into his shoulder and moved past him, sneering viciously. They kept their backs to one another, until Link glanced over his shoulder.

"Start what?" He wondered harmlessly, his eyebrows lowered against his forehead. Shelley balled her fists tightly at her sides, and then turned around to face him again. She lifted one of her hands and pointed her index finger at him accusingly.

"Oh, like you're one to talk. Go back to your street corner, and leave me the fuck alone," Shelley countered, her mind racing suddenly, rendering her genuinely stupid comeback-wise. The fact that Amber and Corny were behind that closed door just a few feet away from her pissed her off more than anyone would ever know, and Link had snipped that final nerve with his unnecessary persistence.

"Real original, Shelley," Link shoved his hands into his pockets and watched her in silent amusement. He remembered this part of her: brash, loud, unforgiving, and, as icing on the cake, vastly unoriginal. Shelley's lips curled back into a snarl.

"Is there any point to this, or do you just rattle my cage for the hell of it?" Shelley hated him for doing this to her. He got her so riled up, and for nothing.

"It's fun to see how easily you lose your cool," He shrugged his shoulders again, and she groaned in sheer annoyance.

"You are so beyond childish," She spat, swatting one of his hands away.

"And, as you said before: you're one to talk."

Shelley knew she couldn't win this pointless, and all-around stupid fight against him. He was just toying with her now, and that wasn't right. That was her job.

"Move," She commanded, taking a step towards him, her eyes dark and hostile. She fucking dared him to try anything else. Still, Link stayed where he was, his eyes gazing down at her coolly. After a moment of intense glaring, she attempted to shove him out of her way, but to no avail. "Are you deaf? I said move," Shelley repeated, though far more threateningly this time. Link merely smirked and brushed his fingers over her arms. "Don't touch me, Larkin. I'm not above castrating you in front of the entire damn studio."

"You wouldn't," He said, clearly unconvinced, and too busy messing with the collar of her dress to care.

"I would," Shelley glared and roughly slapped his hand away again. "You're old news. I don't deal with used goods."

"Funny," He considered her, his expression unreadable to her, for once.

"And just what is that supposed to mean?"

"Let's see," A smirk played on his lips. "What about Amber?"

Shelley's face almost fell. Honestly, if it weren't for the fact that her eyes were already looking away from him, she would have completely lost her composure.

Did he actually know something? An absolute idiot like him?

"Excuse me?" She rejoined, her voice nearly quivering with shock and, above all else, extreme and sudden anxiety.

"You two seem close enough. Acquaintances, maybe," He tilted his head slightly. "It's funny, but I seem to remember you saying something about taking out the trash and distancing yourself from people you didn't think were 'good enough' for you."

Shelley breathed. Link was such a little prick, scaring her like that. Her heart was pounding in her ears, and she felt sick to her stomach; however, on the outside, she looked as composed as ever, with her chin tilted upward somewhat, as it always was.

"That is none of your business," She narrowed her eyes at him once again, and tried to move past him, only to have him grab her by the shoulders gently.

"So, maybe it's not. Whatever," He looked at her, debating how he was

going to say what he wanted to next. "Look, my point is: You are seriously fucking yourself over with this, Shelley. You're playing a game that you just can't win. Not all of us are cut out for this dog-eat-dog world, you know? I'm just counting down the days until you finally screw with the wrong person," The way that he talked to her so smugly made her nauseous, and that smirk hidden beneath his fake smile only made her even more sick to her stomach. She seriously had to swallow to keep herself from throwing up.

"_You_," She pushed the palm of her hand violently against his chest, while she kept her voice at a low and scornful whisper. "are a serious load of bullshit, Link. And you know what? I hope you enjoy screwing around with that fat cow, because maybe then you'll actually get some character."

Link remained silent and just stared back at her, his eyes dim with something she would be lying to herself if she said she didn't recognize. Shelley's lips were pressed tightly together and curved into the nastiest of sneers. It was a typical expression for her, though only for people so lucky as him, unfortunately.

The staring match was relentless, and Shelley found herself curious to glance over at Corny's dressing room door. She anticipated that Amber would walk out at any moment, but, at the same time, willed herself not to care as much as she honestly did. When she swore that she saw Link move, she almost recoiled, a revolted look on her face.

"Don't you dare kiss me," She snarled, her eyebrows furrowing furiously. Link smirked, his fingers creeping upwards to cup the underside of her chin forcefully. "I swear to God, Link, I'll kill you!"

It was a sub-conscience decision, really. At the sound of Corny's dressing room door opening, Shelley didn't even bother to argue anymore. She kissed him fiercely, her fingers digging into his hair as she kept his lips pressed firmly against hers. It was at that moment that she knew where she was going with this, where her mind was abruptly leading her. Shelley could beat Amber at her own little whore games.

She would show her just how much she wasn't needed, and how fine she was without her. Shelley was independent, and she wasn't about to have some doting blonde thinking that she had her wrapped around her little finger. Oh, God no. It was always the other way around. Always.

When Shelley pulled back from him, he looked as haughty as anything.

"So much for high standards, right, Shel?"

Now she really wished she had opted to bite his tongue. And hard.

"You wish you were right," Shelley wiped her mouth just below her bottom lip with her thumb. He had always been such a sloppy kisser. He had made her into such a good actress over the years; if only he would come off his vanity cloud to take any notice. "I don't need you. I never have, and I never will," She snapped at him in a whisper

and shouldered past, her head held high. As she began to walk away, he stood there, taking what she said into playful and comical consideration.

"Want and need are two totally different things, darlin'," Link replied with sarcastic, sugary sweetness. Shelley could practically feel the acids rising up in her throat again, for the thousandth time.

Want was the easy part of the equation; it was the need that left her dumbfounded.

3. It's A Matter Of Time

****Kelsey Rose****: Eeee. This excites me. I always have so much fun writing for this story! Here's to another chapter. -love-

****Tracy****: I love this story, it's so much fun and such a switch from what Kelsey and I are used to with these characters -hint, hint.- Enjoy!

* * *

>It was either by sheer luck, or complete lack of it, that Amber departed from Corny's dressing room at the exact moment that Shelley had, for whatever reason unbeknownst to her, pressed her lips against Link's. It unfolded almost in slow motion for her, and there was a sudden, sick twinge in the pit of her stomach. Her lips curled into a sneer, her eyes suddenly burning with an almost blinding sensation that she didn't realize until much later as jealousy. Her cheeks flushed pink, and she locked her knees in place, though she couldn't be quite sure if all of that was because of the scene in front of her, or because of what had taken place in Corny's dressing room just moments ago. <p>She swallowed the hard lump in her throat, clenched her teeth, and narrowed her eyes. Her heart was pounding, and she ducked her head, letting her voice escape from her in a loud hiss.<p>

"Shelley! Come here!" She was half tempted to stomp her foot, motioning to the spot on the floor in front of her. What in the hell was she trying to prove by kissing Link? Link, of all people. The thought alone made her stomach churn, though she tried her best to keep her composure as the remaining Council members scattered around her.

Shelley had almost reached the stage door when she heard Amber's shrill voice. Rolling her eyes in irritation, she groaned, propped her hand upon her hip, and paused in mid-step, her back still turned to Amber. She knew exactly what she was so pissed about. It didn't exactly take a brain surgeon to put two and two together.

"I'm not a dog, Amber," She called over her shoulder, her eyes narrowed, despite the fact that Amber couldn't see. "You have legs. Walk."

If, at that moment, Amber hadn't been so fiercely desperate to confront Shelley, she would have protested, or just abandoned the entire situation. She was, however, in no mood to let this matter drop, and her feet almost instinctively carried her across the studio

floor. Once she reached the redhead, she reached for her slender wrist, wrapping her thin fingers around it and pulling her behind a wall, gritting her teeth at her.

"What in the hell was that?" Her cheeks were flushed, "What, you're just kissing random idiots now?"

Shelley laughed meanly.

"Yes, Amber, that's exactly what I'm doing," She scowled at her. "You and Link are just the start of the 'random idiots' I plan on kissing," Shelley snatched her wrist away from Amber and took a step back. "You know, you have _a lot_ of nerve, walking out of his room, after just _fucking_ him, to yell at me for kissing someone. _Really_ classy, Amber."

Amber narrowed her steely blue eyes at the other girl, taking an awkward step away from her before scoffing softly and lowering her voice.

"I didn't _fuck_ him, Shelley. Jesus Christ, what do you think he is, Superman? I was only in there for ten minutes." She pursed her lips together. It would have been smart of her to stop speaking now, if only to save herself the embarrassment of any hypocrisy, but it was far too late for that. "Stop being so damn paranoid, would you?"

It would have been so much easier to lie to her if Amber's cheeks weren't quite so flushed, her lips not quite as full. She let her tongue dart out of her mouth nervously, then attempted to steady her trembling hands.

If she had been in her right mind, Shelley would have known better. She knew that Amber had only been in there for a very short amount of time, but jealousy always made her jump to conclusions and say overtly idiotic things in turn.

"I never said I was," She hissed, her eyes narrowed still. "You're the one charging out of _that man's_ dressing room, your legs and hands trembling for God-knows-why, mad because I kissed someone else," Shelley lowered her voice threateningly. "I swear to God, Amber, you are the biggest, saddest hypocrite I know."

She turned her back to Amber. There was no way in hell she was going to deal with her and this right now.

"Just back off, would you?" Shelley snapped, her piercing gaze set ahead of her as she began to excuse herself from the confrontation.

There was something in Amber that would just _not_ allow her to back down from this sudden argument, and she sneered.

"You're pathetic! Don't turn your back on me!" She reached for the other girl's shoulders, digging her nails into her dress, forcing her to lock eyes with her. "I think the _least_ you owe me is some kind of explanation, Shelley. What the hell, you don't even _like_ Link." She glared at her, the corners of her mouth slowly transforming into a subtle frown, her eyebrows furrowing slightly. "Do you?" Her words were soft, and barely above a whisper, nearly drowned out by the sudden clack of dress shoes against the cement floor as Corny made

his way down the hallway, blatantly ignoring the girls as they stood facing each other.

Shelley managed to keep herself from squealing in surprise as Amber roughly grabbed onto her shoulders and spun her about. She glared maliciously at the blonde, her teeth biting down on her tongue harshly as she fought back the urge to slap some sense into her.

"Don't you ever touch me like that again, Amber von Tussle," She warned her, both of her hands forming taut fists at her sides. "And, as for Link, who I like is really none of your business, now, is it?" Shelley could've gone into a long spill about the past, and about her and Link's history, but she wanted to save herself from the yuck-fest.

Just as she was about to shove another threat in Amber's direction, a bit of movement caught her eye. She let her gaze wander over, only to find Corny walking to someplace nearby. Hardly stifling a loud, sardonic laugh, she glanced back at Amber, her expression dappled with hatred.

"Oh, look, Amber, it's your little old fuck-buddy," She said cruelly, her voice taking on a high-pitched, mocking tone. "Quick, you better hurry and get on your knees before it's too late."

Amber gasped sharply, her eyes narrowed into slits of blue hatred.

"You bitch!" She had always prided herself on being able to contain the violent tendencies that slipped into her brain at any given time during the day, but all of those restraints had been pushed out the window at Shelley's words.

She lunged forward suddenly, curling her fingers into claws and tangling them into Shelley's red hair, pulling her head back viciously, a low cry beginning in her throat and tearing through her. She couldn't be exactly sure why she had decided to take such a heated stance against her, though part of her believed that it was more to defend her own self-image than for Corny himself.

Shelley howled in pain as she felt the force of Amber yanking her hair. Cursing loudly, she took her hand and swiped it across Amber's face, her fingernails digging into the skin as it went. She pushed Amber with both of her hands, and then dug her fingers into her perfect blonde hair. Shelley pulled with a merciless vigor, her sharp fingernails scratching violently against the other girl's scalp. Amber had started this whole mess, and she was entirely set on making her feel damn sorry for even thinking that she had any place to do so.

Amber screeched in retaliation. Instinct told her to release Shelley and clutch her own face, but pure adrenaline told her to pull harder on the red strands and to dig her fingernails into the most tender part of her scalp. She followed these internal instructions, yanking on the strands despite the searing pain that Shelley was currently inflicting upon her.

As much as Shelley wanted to scream, she kept herself from it. She wasn't weak like that; she blatantly refused to let Amber get the

better of her, especially in a public setting such as this. Grunting angrily, she blinked her eyes, trying to keep them from tearing up more than they already were. Her strength was slowly being taken from her, but she fought back, pulling, yanking, and scratching at Amber's skin and hair in attempts to successfully counter her.

"Don't fucking touch me!" Amber yelled. However, it was, of course, too late for that. She had already left scratches running down the length of her cheek, and her face was throbbing. She growled, letting herself be taken by another rush as she lunged for her again, managing to dig her nails into the tender flesh of Shelley's cheek, just as she heard the sudden voice behind them.

"Hey!" He called out sharply, his shoes noisy on the ground as he rushed toward them, "Cut it out!" His long fingers hooked around Amber's waist, pulling her away from the redhead, though not without a bit of a struggle from her first. Corny pushed Shelley away, somewhat surprised at the strength of the thin girl. He let one hand rest gently against Shelley's shoulder, cupping it somewhat awkwardly, and the other against Amber's hip, though not necessarily holding her to him. "What the hell's going on?"

He glanced accusingly towards Shelley, making no motion to move from either of them, his blue eyes narrowed.

"What's your problem, Shelley?"

Amber stood beside him, her eyes burning as she rolled them back into her head, desperate to stop the tears before they fell. She let her fingers work around Corny's hand, holding it lightly, somewhat unconsciously.

Shelley breathed heavily for a moment, her eyes fixed in such a furious and challenging fashion that she essentially provoked Corny and Amber to try anything in front of her. She shrugged her shoulder brusquely out of Corny's grasp, and stepped away from the pair of them.

"Get your hand off me, you pathetic, womanizing asshole!" She barked at him, the pain finally setting in at full force. Her body ached suddenly, and she wanted nothing more than to just run away, head home, and nurse her wounds in the privacy of her bedroom. Glaring at both of them, she actually had to keep herself from spitting in disgust, throwing up, lashing out at both Corny and Amber, or all of the above. "And, while you're at it, tell your little slut to keep her hands to herself, too."

Amber gasped once more and shifted suddenly. Corny moved quickly, catching her before she could attack again.

"Amber, stop." He let his eyes meet hers, his voice firm and clearly not amused. "Just stop."

> She was slightly put off at the idea that he wasn't as outraged as she was at Shelley's words, and glared at him for a moment before crossing her arms over her chest and trying to ignore the sudden feeling of complete brokenness that encompassed her.<p>

"Corny! She-" She pointed accusingly at Shelley, as if he hadn't just witnessed the entire event.

"I said _stop_." He glared harshly at her, and she narrowed her eyes at him, her cheeks blushing a deeper shade of crimson, looking away from both of them. "Shelley, just go. Just go home."

Shelley stared at Corny incredulously for a moment, while he made no effort to move towards either of them, but kept his eyes focused on the redhead. Amber watched Shelley with heavy eyes, clenching her jaw and rocking back on her heels slightly in a subtle attempt to soothe herself from the pain. Shelley, on the other hand, could only continue stare at him, an enormous depth of hatred in her eyes.

"Yes, Shelley, go home." Amber sneered at her suddenly, "If you're that damn jealous, just go."

"Amber," His voice was at a warning tone, and he turned to look at her now, his eyes dark. "She has nothing to be jealous of. There is _nothing_ going on between us, isn't that right?"

She caught his gaze, then clenched her jaw. God, he was stupider than she thought he was, if he didn't realize that Shelley already knew about them. Still, she let herself play along with his charade, however remorsefully.

"That's right."

Shelley let her mouth hang open. Whether it was in shock, disbelief, anger, hurt, or what, she couldn't decide. However, one thing she did know was that she wasn't about to take shit from Corny, too, much less be tag-teamed by Amber _and_ him. That was just a complete and total insult, as well as vicious slap to the face. Practically hissing venom at both of them, she forcefully shoved Corny with her hands, her eyes seething with rage.

"Don't you tell me what to do," She warned, her lips peeled back in an ugly sneer as she gritted her teeth. "I'm not stupid, Corny. I've seen you two together. So, don't fucking treat me like a damn oblivious child. It's _insulting_," Shelley dug her fingernails into his shoulder through the cloth of his jacket, where one of her hands had chosen to challengingly rest after the shove.

Corny glared at her, his blue eyes narrowed, before taking a step back, brushing her hand from his shoulder.

"If you're going to yell at me like you're some high and mighty _superhero_ of an adult, at least get your facts straight. Jesus," Shelley paused to sigh in frustration. "You're about as stupid as her," She glared over at Amber, and then glanced back at Corny. "At least you have a little better taste in things."

"Listen to me, Shelley, and listen good." Amber watched as Corny took a step closer to Shelley, and another step away from her. She was slightly intrigued by the fact that even now, when he was beyond frustrated, he managed to keep his cool. Still, as her eyes brushed Shelley's, she lowered her gaze to the ground, unable to look the seething redhead in the eye. "Watch your mouth. I could have you off this show with one damn breath, do you understand?"

"Corny!" Amber chastised him suddenly, her cheeks flushing for no apparent reason. She could _not_ allow him to kick her off the show;

that would totally cease their interactions altogether, and as painful as it often was to see her, she knew that she could not function without these sporadic fights between them.

Shelley scoffed. Oh, wow. There was the world's most original comeback right there.

"Oh, yeah? Is that the breath where you say 'I'm coming!'" She mocked Corny's voice as she said it, and then rolled her eyes in disgust. "That's how you got Brenda off the show, right?" Shelley took a step back from him with her head held high and her shoulders back proudly. "Well, hate to burst your bubble, O Great One, but I'm not like Brenda. I actually let my brain control me, and not what's between my legs," She scowled at him. "You're a sick, disgusting, and pathetic man. I really don't know what Amber sees in you, because you're just a horny and absolutely worthless piece of shit."

Amber let herself gasp at the other girl's statement, and Corny clenched his jaw, narrowing his eyes into hateful slits toward Shelley. He took another step toward her, and when he spoke, his voice was barely above a whisper.

"You are a little girl that thinks she knows everything about the whole God-damn world, aren't you? Shelley, I'm telling you this once, and never again: Stay the hell out of my personal business." He turned to glare at Amber suddenly, his eyes dark. "Did you tell her?"

Amber was slightly taken aback, considering the fact that until just this moment, he had denied her existence in his life at all. She glanced at Shelley, who appeared rather smug, despite Corny's hollow threat, her face flushing a deep crimson, before shaking her head quickly.

"Noâ€”Iâ€” tell her what?"

He stood watching her, his face taut. His eyes were dark, studying hers. He was attempting to communicate with her through that intense gaze, and Amber immediately knew what he was asking. Had she told Shelley about her and Corny? God, no. That was the absolute last thing on earth she ever would have done.

"No," Her reply was simple and quiet, "I wouldn't. I didn't."

His jaw tightened, and for a moment he looked as if he might speak, but then turned to Shelley again.

"You'd do well to not go around sticking your nose where it doesn't belong, Shelley. Try to remember that."

Shelley laughed meanly at his remark.

"I could say the same about you and your dick, Corny," She spat back at him, her eyes narrowed and ablaze with a silent challenge. Shelley had no shame; she could argue with him until they both took their last breaths. That didn't faze her. Besides, she would be damned if she let him go on like this, with Amber, while she knew every aspect of their little, perverse game.

"Shelley!" Amber pushed in front of Corny suddenly, narrowing her eyes at the other girl, "Stop! That's disgusting, and it's a total lie!"

"Oh, really, Amber?" Shelley snapped at her, shoving her with all of the strength she could muster. "You're such a little lying slut, you know that? You'll fuck anyone who even spends so much as twenty seconds with you," She glared. "It's really rather sad."

"You're one to talk, you manipulative little whore," she shot back quickly, her blue eyes slits of hatred, "You're so damn stupid, Shelley, that now you're even beginning to put yourself down. You thinkâ€" "

"Stop!" Corny interrupted them, grasping Amber by the shoulder and pushing her back further, "Jesus, Christ, get a hold of yourselves."

"Don't you touch her!" Shelley growled, lunging at Corny almost involuntarily. She grasped onto one of his wrists, her fingernails digging into the skin there, as well as on his neck, where her other hand went.

"What the hell!" Corny cried the words suddenly, his hand working around Shelley's wrist and attempting to force her away from him, his hands pushing her back, only to have her lunge back at him all over again, "Amber, get her off of me!"

Amber stood watching them for a moment, looking on as Shelley's fingernails dug into his skin. She took a slight step forward, and let her hands reach out, though this time without sharpening her claws or scraping them down either person's cheek. Instead, she let her hand fall gently on Shelley's shoulder, if only for a moment, forcing their eyes to meet.

"Shelleyâ€¦ don't," she pleaded with her quietly, shaking her head, "Just let it go."

For a moment, Shelley seriously debated telling Amber off for even thinking that she would just let something go. That wasn't her style at all. As a matter of fact, that was the last thing on her mind with any situation, though this particular one especially. Groaning angrily, she snatched her hands away and stepped back. She glared at Amber once more and yanked her coat around herself again.

"Have a nice life," She rejoined forebodingly, her legs carrying her away from both of them promptly and without any remorse whatsoever.

Amber blinked, then swallowed, watching her go and using every inch of her strength not to follow her before turning back to Corny, crossing her arms over her chest and frowning at him.

"You've ruined everything, Corny." Her voice was low and monotone.

He arched an eyebrow at her, letting his hands straighten his collar before speaking.

"Oh, please, Amber. You and Shelley have hated each other since the beginning of time. I think you'll live."

"Yeah, I'll live," she snapped back at him, "no thanks to you, I'm sure. You seem to make an effort to keep me miserable, Corny."

He smirked at her, his eyes meeting hers.

"Yeah, well," he cleared his throat, dipping his head close to hers, "You manage to make my life a living hell without even trying."

He was gone a moment later, and Amber stood in the silence of the corridor before her feet were moving, her heels clicking against the floor as she raced toward the door that she'd seen Shelley exit from just moments before, pushing it open and dashing into the parking lot, calling her name into the nearly abandoned space there, moving until she caught up with her, panting slightly.

"Shelley, don't do this," she sighed suddenly, shaking her head, "Don't just leave like this again."

Shelley was in the process of unlocking her car, when she heard Amber's grating voice. Turning to gaze at her irritably, she leaned her hip against her car and placed her hand on her other one.

"Stop acting like a spineless, groveling wimp, Amber," She said pitilessly, her expression indifferent. "Grow up, and go back inside, into his office, where you and the rest of those whores belong."

Amber sucked in her bottom lip, crossing her arms over her chest and shaking her head, the wind whipping through her blonde hair, only serving to dishevel her further.

"That's not where I belong," she tried to insist quietly, "It's justâ€¦ it's the only place I can find any kind of love."

Shelley rolled her eyes in disgust.

"You are so pathetic," She finally unlocked her car, opened the door, and tossed her purse in the passenger's seat. "That's not love. He's using you because he knows that he can take advantage of dumbassed teenaged girls like you."

Amber narrowed her eyes suddenly, stepping closer to her.

"Does that make you feel better?" She asked suddenly, "Thinking like that, thinking that he's only using me to break my heart? Does that make you happy, Shelley?"

Shelley stared at her indignantly, letting her shoulders fall in mock defeat.

"Sure, Amber," She tossed her hands up, clearly signifying that she was through with the conversation. "Whatever. If that's what you want to think, be my guest, but I'm not playing this game with you anymore. Do you understand me?" Shelley got into her car, one foot still propped upon the concrete of the parking lot. "You can have him, and only him, but don't you dare come crying to me when you wind up just like Brenda."

Amber held the car door open, glaring down at her, her eyes burning with all of the emotion she was forcing herself to hold back.

"Believe me, I won't," she told her quietly, her tone cold and hurt, "You're never there for me to cry to, anyway."

"I shouldn't have to be," She replied tartly, her eyebrows lowering. "You're a big girl, after all, Amber," Shelley told her sardonically, as she reached for the handle to close the car door. "Now, _move_."

"No." Amber stayed put, her fingers tightening around the edge of the door. "I'm not moving until you tell me why we keep playing this game with each other. I am not moving an inch until you satisfy me with an answer."

"You don't deserve any answers from me, Amber von Tussle," She attempted to slap Amber's hands away from the door. "You're going to make me late. Get out of the way."

"No," Amber repeated, her voice harder this time, "Stop telling me what to do, Shelley. You have no right to do this. You can't just run away from me every time you don't feel like fighting anymore."

"I _do_ have the right," She rolled her eyes yet again. "Amber, I'm not going to talk about this with you anymore. I want nothing more to do with you. Do I seriously have to spell that out for you?"

Amber stared down at her hard, clenching her jaw.

"Fine." She took a step back from her, slamming the door, nearly catching Shelley's fingers in the hinges. "Go, you heartless bitch. Just get the hell away, and call me later to let me know what it feels like knowing you're going to spend the rest of your life alone."

She didn't wait to watch Shelley's car pull out of the lot and spun on her heels, stomping her way back into the studio and slamming the door behind her as she entered.

It wasn't pride, or anger that kept her from standing there, screaming obscenities at her even as she drove away. Amber wasn't afraid to test her; she'd done it so many times before that it had just come to be a natural part of their relationship.

The only thing that really kept Amber from screaming and throwing things at her car as she drove away was the fact that, after everything they'd been through, it hurt too damn much to watch her leave again.

4. I'm In The Business Of Misery

****Kelsey Rose****: I have to say, this has some of my absolute favorites in it. :P The flashback you're about to read was actually the first thing that Tracy and I ever wrote for this story, soâ€|haha. Just an interesting bit of history there.**** ****

****Tracy****: Kelsey said it all!

* * *

xxx

"I still cannot believe that arrogant jackass. I mean, come on, seriously, Shelley. We had a date, and he completely ditched me for that total skank?" Amber reached towards the vanity a few feet away from them, one hand still tangled in Shelley's red strands while the other groped for the heavy brush. She brought it back to the other girl's scalp, dragging it down unmercifully, causing the her head to pull back sharply. Amber sighed exasperatedly, dropping her other hand to the top of Shelley's head, steadying it as she repeated her rough motions.

"I mean, what the hell? Who does she think she is? Who does he think he is? She cannot compete with me, is she seriously even trying? It's ridiculous, really," She began to brush furiously, yanking Shelley's head back in an erratic rhythm, ignoring the groans of protest that came from the redhead. Shelley hissed, her eyebrows lowering in displeasure as Amber continued. There was only so much physical abuse and verbal torture that she could take before she just lost her mind. Amber was treading on thin ice with about a millimeter left to go before all hell broke lose.

"I bet it's because she can do the splits; it probably makes her that much looser, if you know what I mean. That's probably the only reason he likes her. He probably doesn't even like her, he just wants to get laid. Well, he can have that nasty little whore, then, because he's sure as hell not getting any from me," Amber shuddered as she continued to pull on Shelley's hair, completely ignorant to the fact that she was brushing through clumps of hairspray and bobby pins, inadvertently pulling hairs from Shelley's scalp.

"Amber!" Shelley practically squealed the girl's name as she tore the brush through her hair. This was her hair she was ruining, and that was not okay with her. "Shut the fuck up, and pay attention to what you're doing," She narrowed her eyes and bit her tongue. There she was. She was so close to just turning on her and completely exploding with rage.

Amber thought for a moment, and brought the brush down to Shelley's scalp again, its bristles striking into the crown of her head.

"Eww. Who would touch him after they find out he's been with her? I never will again, that's for sure. Seriously. God, she makes me sick. He makes me sick. Doesn't that make you sick?"

"No, Amber," Shelley growled the words as she turned around and sharply snatched the brush from her hand. "What makes me sick is hearing you run your goddamn mouth all the fucking time. Where is the off switch when I need it, anyway? Who cares about this guy?" She exhaled in exasperation and got up to move over to the vanity. As she began to nurse her tormented hair, she made a point to continue her malicious glare at Amber via the mirror.

"So, he ditched you. Grow some balls, and get over it. You're acting like some love-struck grade-schooler who just got dumped for the first time," Shelley rolled her eyes and scoffed. "Grow up. I'm sick

of hearing your whiny voice. I swear to God, and on my life, it is one of the most annoying things I have ever heard."

Amber sneered suddenly, her mouth dropping open slightly as she kept Shelley's hard gaze in the mirror. She was indignant all of a sudden, and straightened her posture, raising her chin and clenching her jaw as she studied her reflection.

"That's easy for you to say," she shot back quickly, "You didn't get stood up for that cheap hooker," She narrowed her steely gaze into the mirror. "I'm just trying to get it off my chest," Amber frowned at Shelley's reflection, her forehead creasing in frustration and anger. "I mean, really, Shelley, you'd be so pissed. You probably wouldn't even be able to see straight, you'd be so mad. I know how you are," She took a moment to study her fingernails nonchalantly, her face burning slightly with the sudden chastisement she'd taken from the other girl. Shelley, on the other hand, had to keep herself from laughing.

"You obviously don't know me at all, Amber. I make the notches on the bedpost, not them. There is no 'he' or 'him,' it's all me. Understand? I don't let some sweaty, testosterone-overdosed slob control my mood. I am way better than that," She brushed her fingers through her hair and studied herself in the mirror.

"You keep telling yourself that," Amber rolled her eyes sardonically, "but I know you. I know you better than you know yourself, apparently." She was silent for a moment, and let her gaze drop, defeated, from Shelley's in the reflection, crossing her arms over her chest and huffing. Still, Amber cleared her throat again, clenching her teeth together.

"And my voice isn't annoying," Amber defended herself quietly after a beat, "You're just pissed because I pulled some of your hair out. You'll live, Shel, I promise," She shot her a scathing look as she smoothed her own blonde locks over her shoulder, "It's not like we haven't done worse to each other, really," She smirked a little, catching her gaze.

"Don't be such a hypocrite, Amber," She sneered again, her expression darkening very quickly. "You would bitch up a storm if someone did this to you," Shelley tipped her nose in the air haughtily. "And I'm pissed because you just assaulted me with a damn hairbrush. I honestly will not be surprised if I see bruises there tomorrow," She added harshly, barely getting her sentence out before Amber continued with her next thought.

"Oh, Jesus, Shelley, don't be such a damn drama queen. Really, melodramatic does not look good on you. Now, listen, and tell me what you think about this. When I was at school the other day, he had the nerve to come up to me and ask me what I did last Saturday night. Can you believe that? He actually had the balls to ask me what I did after he stood me up. That just blows my mind, I mean, literally blows my mind, Shelley," She stood, looking at her expectantly, blinking as she waited for a response, her fingertips tapping impatiently against her own hips.

Shelley threw her arms up in the air in frustration and spun about to face her. She stepped towards her, grabbed her by the face, and glared intensely at her. Her fingernails dug lightly into the skin of

her cheeks as she wrinkled her nose slightly in disgust. Amber started at her sudden actions, gasping slightly as Shelley grabbed her face so tightly.

"Amber, for the love of God, shut the fuck up," She shook Amber's head a little with each of the last four words she said. "I don't care about this guy. I don't care that he stood you up. And I sure as hell don't care to offer my opinion about something that I just don't give two shits about. _Stop talking _before I knock the hell out of you."

Amber narrowed her gaze, whimpering inwardly at the pain of the other girl's fingernails digging into her soft flesh.

"Let go of me," Amber's voice was cold and hard now, and she kept her gaze focused steady on Shelley's face, which was only mere inches from hers. She let her eyes trace over the other girl's features, hardened into what Amber could only read as pure disdain. She felt her lips slipping into a soft pout, just barely letting her eyes glance downward at the silky pajamas they wore. She really didn't see why Shelley had even asked her to sleep over at her house tonight. If she had no intention of listening to a word she said, Amber really would have been better off talking to the walls and stuffed dogs in her room.

"Let go of my face," Amber repeated softly, though she made no attempt to move herself. She raised her eyes back to Shelley's set gaze, then down, over her slightly turned-up nose, to her soft, red lips. She felt a sudden and unnatural yearning inside of her suddenly, and attempted to pull away for the first time. Shelley's grasp kept her in place, and she swallowed, unable to tear her eyes away from her face, now without reason. She tried to convince herself that she was confusing hate with something else; lust maybe, but failed miserably, and moved quickly then, letting her eyes close as she began towards Shelley with the sudden inexplicable desire to kiss those red lips, though she had no idea why. Suddenly, it was all she could think about; feeling those soft, lip-stick stained lips crushing against her own, their bodies pushed together in a desperate and futile attempt to get ever-closer to the other one. Shelley's long, thin fingers tangled in her blonde hair, pulling Amber to her, Amber sighing her name softly as they inevitably parted to catch their breath. It was a necessity she suddenly could no longer live without.

Shelley's eyes widened as she saw Amber closing the distance between them. Groaning in displeasure, she immediately turned her head to evade any contact with her. Consequently, Amber's lips brushed the soft skin at the edge of Shelley's lips, completely missing their planned target, and sending a rush of crimson through the blonde girl's face.

"What the fuck?" Amber's voice was at a high pitch, her face burning as she pulled back quickly, obviously surprised by the unintended result of her intended actions. "Damn it, Shelley, what are you doing?" Her tongue darted out to lick her lips, followed by a raised hand to wipe her own mouth, as if she hadn't wanted the kiss to begin with. "You're the one that started this!" It was her only line of defense; Shelley had, after all, grabbed her and kept their gazes locked so intimately that Amber had no _choice_ to believe that she was simply waiting to be kissed. Shelley's lips had been begging her

to caress them, anyway.

"Me?" Shelley recoiled and dropped her hands at her sides. Suddenly, though, after a moment of silent hesitation, her eyes glimmered darkly. "No, Amber," She said softly, her eyes narrowed and determined as she took another step towards her. "If I would have started it, it would have been more like this," Shelley grasped Amber by her wrists and pushed her against the nearby wall. Her lips pressed roughly against hers in a very heated and shameless kiss. Amber stumbled back at the force, her eyes closing almost instinctively, her head tilting and lifting accordingly as Shelley's lips worked over her own so unexpectedly.

Shelley's hands, after moving from their positions of holding Amber's wrists to the wall, traveled, one to Amber's left hip and the other to the right side of her neck. Amber shifted beneath her, the muscles in her stomach tensing slightly as she felt Shelley's hands moving over her. They continued the kiss with no pause, Shelley's teeth grazing the blonde's bottom lip. She bit down somewhat roughly in order to coax her mouth to open slightly so that she could explore the mouth that she had seemed to hate and yet, at the same time, crave for so long. Amber obliged, moaning almost inaudibly as she felt Shelley's tongue slip into the warm crevice of her mouth, using her own teeth to nip at the other girl's lower lip now, then flicking her tongue over the slight indentations she made. Keeping herself pressed firmly against her, the hand at Amber's waist tugged at the fabric of her night gown, just as a quiet sigh escaped Shelley's lips as she broke the kiss momentarily to breathe. Amber pulled her head back just slightly, enough for a small gasp to escape her lips, her eyes traveling noncommittally down Shelley's body, then to the place where the other girl's hand rested on her nightgown, deep breaths shuddering through her.

"That is how I would have started it, Amber Von Tussle," Her lips were merely a centimeter away from Amber's. She stared into her alleged friend's eyes with a dark sense of lust reflecting in her own gaze.

Amber tried to steady the shallow breaths that seemed to have taken her over, and Shelley moved to press her lips against the skin on the base of Amber's neck, nibbling gently. The blonde girl tilted her head, allowing her easier access, and closing her eyes, swallowing hard at this new sensation coursing through her. Shelley's kisses were different from any of the boys that she'd been with. Their lips were always rough and quick, uncaring about this type of foreplay because all they really wanted was the end-result, when they could slide into home. Shelley's lips seemed to be full of magic; they made Amber shudder instinctively each time they touched her porcelain skin, and she let out a soft groan as she felt Shelley's hands upon her, still pulling at the fabric of her nightgown; the only thing that separated them now was the thin material of their night clothes.

Amber wasn't even completely sure what was happening, but she was suddenly and painfully aware of the fact that she wanted it to be happening. There was a fire burning in the lower part of her belly, and she couldn't keep her hands clenched into the tight fists at her side any longer. She let her fingers trace up Shelley's smooth arms, resting momentarily on her shoulder before moving to cup the redhead's face, pulling her into a deep, passionate kiss that had

their lips crushed together unmercifully, their teeth nearly clashing from the ferocity of the action. She moved her fingers into the other girl's red tresses, tugging on them playfully, a smirk falling across her lips as she received every kiss that Shelley gave her. Her hard kisses left Amber's mouth sore and tired, but she wasn't about to retreat from this stand they were both taking. Something about feeling Shelley's sharp curves pressed against her own felt so deliciously wrong, and Amber snaked her arms around the redhead's waist, pulling her closer, feeling the warmth of her body through their thin clothes.

Amber nodded almost subconsciously to the other girl, her fingers tracing down the redhead's neck and letting her fingers play just at the neckline of Shelley's gown, her fingernails dipping below the cotton boundary, tracing the skin on Shelley's chest. Amber swallowed, letting her eyes fall to that forbidden place below her neckline. Her tongue darted out to moisten her lips as her fingers brushed against the delicate skin there. She pulled her hand back slowly, almost regretfully, and instead let her fingers drag down the collar of the fabric, letting her lips place soft, moist kisses on the skin just below.

Shelley purred softly as she traced her hands down Amber's sides, her eyes closing somewhat as she lost herself in Amber's skilled kisses. She was a hell of a lot better than any guy she had ever kissed, that was for certain, but Shelley knew it was the way that Amber knew exactly where to go that really lit a fire inside of her.

To Amber, Shelley's skin was like cinnamon and vanilla, and Amber instinctively found herself addicted to the taste. She knew that even now, in their lust-filled glory, that taste would get her through this, no matter how unsure she felt of herself, and later, as months passed, Amber found herself thinking of Shelley's skin each time she encountered either of those tastes in her daily life. But there was no time to think of the past or future as she tilted Shelley's head, her lips still kissing the base of Shelley's throat, wanting to travel further, but so ridiculously afraid as to what that may entail. Right now, all they had was the present, and what a present it was.

Amber let her fingers trace down the front of Shelley's gown, her breath hitching in her throat as she found the buttons, hesitating, refusing to let her fingers make another move until Shelley gave her some kind of sign about exactly how far she was expecting to let this go.

Shelley's eyes fluttered open completely, and she stared at Amber, one eyebrow raised. After a few moments, a smirk settled on her features, and she grasped onto Amber's wrist lightly, her manicured fingernails playfully digging into the skin. She shoved Amber backwards onto her bed and climbed on top of her, her legs resting on either side of her. Sneering at her deviously, she pulled a few strands of Amber's pretty locks of hair.

"You're too slow, Von Tussle."

xxx

* * *

The heavy scent of cigarette smoke filled the room, as Shelley sat there, her legs crossed, in a house robe, with a cigarette poised between her lips. Even now, that almost painful memory of Amber and her that one night six months ago would not leave her the fuck alone. She didn't smoke on normal occasions, because she was a dancer, and that was a stupid decision, but today, as she sat there on Link's bed, with him practically snoring like a gorilla over to her left, she felt like smoking the hell out the pack of cigarettes that he had offered to her. It was the only way that she could keep her mind away from that first time with Amber, the one that had started everything between them—the one that she thought had single-handedly ruined her life.

"God, Link, _shut up_," Shelley hissed, as she shoved a pillow violently in his direction. She blew the smoke out of her mouth and rolled her eyes. "You are so disgusting."

Link rolled over, one eyebrow raised as he looked at her questioningly.

"My, aren't we charming today?" He countered bitterly. She had to turn her head to save herself the sight of his bare chest. For some reason, she just could not bring herself to look at him right now. Whether or not that they just slept together meant nothing.

"Shut the fuck up," She warned him, as she took a long drag on the cigarette. God, in spite of every attempt she was making to shove those images of Amber out of her head, they still clouded her thoughts, and she shifted, annoyed. Although, she had to admit, she didn't once feel bad for constantly thinking of Amber while having sex with Link. After all, it was a better thrill than trying to focus on him, and it at least got her through it without any permanent brain damage.

Link was a horrible 'lover,' to the point of being undeserving of even being called that. He only thought about himself, and that pissed Shelley off immensely. That was exactly how he had always been, and it was almost sad, but—just _almost_.

"It's a shame you haven't improved since last time," She added resentfully, as a sneer crossed her lips. "I thought fucking around with Amber and those other girls would've at least taught you _something_," Shelley paused to blow the last of the cigarette smoke out of her mouth. She put the cigarette out on the ashtray that sat on the nightstand next to the bed, and then glanced over at him. "Guess not."

Link rolled his eyes and sat up, glaring at her.

"Well, someone's grateful."

"Don't act like sleeping with you was a _gift_, you jackass," Shelley's lips peeled back into another sneer. "Christ, you're just like all of those other _boys_. It's annoying as hell. Grow up."

"So says the slut of the station," Link pushed his way out of the bed and wandered over to study himself in the mirror. Thank God he at least had boxers on, or else Shelley really would have thrown up.

"Oh, nice one," Shelley snapped sarcastically, as she stared at the ceiling, an angry expression fixed to her features.

"You love me," He said, smirking at her via the mirror. Shelley groaned in annoyance as she began to rummage through her purse.

"If by that you mean I would love to personally castrate you, then yes, I do love you."

Link, unfazed, ran his fingers through his hair and then pulled on his pants. He tossed a shirt on, after a bit of searching, and then glanced over at Shelley, who still looked extremely livid.

"Come on, we're going out to eat."

"Excuse me?"

"I'm taking you out," Link said, daring her to challenge it. Shelley's blood began to boil, and she stood up immediately, her eyes blazing. If there was one thing that ran near the top of her list of things that pissed her the fuck off, it was being told what to do.

"You know what, Link," She began, practically gritting her teeth. "I don't usually admit things like this, but this was a big fucking mistake," She thrust her robe off and clawed around for her dress, which she promptly began to put on. "You are a sad, sorry, conceited little boy with nothing going for him. I seriously hope you choke on your own selfish little tongue one day, you asshole," After angrily tossing her coat on, she grabbed the rest of her things, almost knocking the nightstand over in the process. "Go fuck yourself, seeing as how that's about the only thing you can do right."

Before he could even say anything, she stormed out of the room, and out of his house. She was beyond angry, and that only made her even more pissed off. That's all she ever was these days—"angry. It was a never ending cycle of up and then down again, and she only had herself to whine to about it.

As she neared her car, she hesitated, and bit her lip. She pressed her back against the side of her car and stared in front of her blankly. Time and time again she had to convince herself that Amber essentially being the bane of her existence was nothing short of normal, and that recurring thoughts of her were simply because she couldn't wait until the next time that she could break her down again.

Shelley paused in her thoughts suddenly, and then grinned viciously. That was it. She could get back at Amber with the ultimate insult: her little, cradle-robbing, sex fiend of a 'man.' She could absolutely ruin her. It was just too perfect.

Smirking faintly, she climbed into her car and started it. She would drive to the station, because she knew he was there, working on some arrangements for the big end-of-the-school-year hop, and see, for her own eyes, what was so enchanting about him, why all of those whores practically flocked to his door almost every single day.

She could use Amber's most prized possession against her in the

most wicked of waysâ€”and, maybe then that would teach her a thing or two about fucking with the wrong person.

5. I Got Him Where I Want Him Now

****Kelsey Rose****: This is where things start to get spicy.
;)

****Tracy****: I can't wait to write the next few chapters of this story, and...I'm trying to get back into my other ones, I really, really am. I've had a slight distraction, but I'm really trying to, so...we'll see what happens.

* * *

>Corny, of course, had no idea what he was in for. He found himself in his dressing room sometime after the show that afternoon, loosening his tie, unbuttoning his suit jacket, and resting on the couch. He always took a moment to breathe in his dressing room before heading home for the evening, and figured that he, more than anyone, deserved it. If not for all of the physical exertion he experienced during the show, then certainly for managing to keep the girls on the show away from each other, which in turn kept them away from asking too many questions about him, and inevitably finding out that he had bedded the majority of them.<p><p>

It wasn't difficult to imagine why they wanted him, not in his own mind. He was tall, dark, and handsome. He knew things they wanted to be taught, and would teach them willingly. In all technical aspects, he was their mentor, and took this delegation rather seriously. He was always careful with the responsibility he had been dealt, save for that stupid predicament Brenda had gotten them into. He had given her a hundred dollars, and for this somewhat meager amount of money, she'd assured him that she would keep quiet about the paternity of the child. Whether she would use the money for a back-alley abortion, a new dress, a manicure, he didn't know, and didn't care. He had done what she had expected of him. It was his job to love them for a few moments at any given time, not their entire lives.

Within moments, however, a certain redhead had found her way into the ever-familiar studio. Much to her delight, it was empty. The custodians were through for the evening, and she was left to assume that it would just be Corny and herself. Perfect. Shelley moved stealthily towards his dressing room door, and, just before she decided to rap her knuckles against the wooden door, paused. Smirking, she tossed her coat aside, and then slowly undid her dress until it was nothing but a pile on the floor. Sure, she was only furthering Link's point about her, but she didn't give a shit.

Satisfied, she nonchalantly knocked the back of her palm against the door.

Corny heard the sudden rap against the door and groaned slightly, rising and forcing his feet to carry him to the door. His hand fell upon the knob, and he twisted it, pulling it open. His eyes, almost instinctively, went immediately to Shelley's body, rather than her face, his eyes scanning down her sharp curves before forcing himself to look to her face, attempting not to make a show of sucking in his

breath as his eyes met hers.

"Uh," he stammered for a moment, then clenched his jaw, "Shelley-" and though he knew that, without a moment's hesitation, he should have told her to slip back into that dress crumpled by her feet, but those weren't the words that slipped from his mouth, "What are you doing here?" His eyes locked on her body, even as he spoke.

"I came to see you, of course," She crooned, her eyebrows rising suggestively. Now was her chance to prove her worth as an 'actress,' whatever that called for. Taking a step forward, she shoved him backwards slightly with one push of her palm against his shoulder. "You're alone. That'sâ€¦ different," She observed innocently, her fingers curling around the collar of his shirt.

He let her push her back, his feet hurrying to catch him before he fell and busted his head against the coffee table not too far behind him.

"Shelley-" he said her name again, but found himself suddenly speechless, "You don't-well, you shouldn't be in here." Still, his eyes were fixed on her body, and he allowed his fingers to work up to hers, beginning to uncurl her fingers from his shirt, but pausing just a moment too long with her fingers around his hand, and he held her like that for a moment, his voice dropping suddenly as he observed her, "You're not wearing any clothes."

Shelley smirked and quickly snatched a hold of his hand. Slowly, she brought it towards her, and then carefully positioned it upon her shoulder, where she let his fingers linger where they may.

"As if you're one to protest," She said softly, as she took a step closer to him, her leg brushing against his ever so slightly. Shelley glanced up at him, that playful smirk forever tormenting her features. "Why are you so shy all of a sudden, anyway, Collins?" She wondered, her other hand beginning to creep up his chest until it reached his neck, where it then snaked around it.

"Shy?" The word came out as a cracked whisper, and he shook his head, his fingers suddenly moving without hesitation over her shoulder, cupping it gently, using his fingers to skim the soft skin there. "I don't know the meaning of the word shy, Shelley." He dipped his head in closer to hers, "There are a few dozen girls at your school who would be willing to testify to that."

He narrowed his eyes at her, not bothering to move away.

"You're one of the few council girls that's never even given me a second glance. What are you up to, Shelley?"

"I'm offended, Corny," Shelley pouted her lower lip, and brushed past him. "Honestly, why is it that you assume I'm up to something? Is it not possible that I've always had some sort of secretâ€¦ attraction to you?" She feigned betrayal, and then sat down on his couch in a very 'come hither,' though elegant fashion. Shelley crossed one leg over the other, and leaned back against the couch. Her pale eyes glanced up and over at him with an almost harmless, yet mysterious connotation to them.

He furrowed his eyebrows at her as she retreated to the couch, but

didn't move any closer to her.

"If by secret attraction you mean, tried to scratch my eyes out and blind me, then yes, it's possible you've had some sort of secret attraction to me." He swallowed hard and tore his eyes away from her before looking back at her, "Wait a minute. Does this have something to do with Amber?"

Shelley had to force herself not to roll her eyes. She was already ridiculously nauseated, so there was no point in getting extremely pissed off, as well.

"Why would this have anything to do with Amber?" She began, uncrossing her legs as she did so. "The world does not revolve around her, contrary to popular belief."

He watched her still, with narrowed eyes.

"Yeah, well, the world may not, but a huge part of this studio does, and there's usually not a thing that goes on in this place without her knowing about it." He sighed, taking a step closer to her, "I'm just saying, Shelley, if this is all part of some intricate plot to get back at her for some petty fight you got into, I'm not getting involved." Still, he couldn't force himself to look away from her, "Tell me now if it is, Shelley," he warned lightly, "I'm not some sort of Red Cross for teenage girls with wounded hearts, and I don't provide shelter for the needy." He paused for a moment, then took a step closer to her, his pants leg brushing against the skin of her knee, "So?"

Shelley frowned for a moment, and then stood, now face-to-face with him.

"I'm an independent young woman, Corny," She said sternly, as she began to close the small gap between them. "This has nothing to do with _her_," Shelley said finally, her hands moving to his neck. Gradually, she leaned up and pressed her lips against his firmly, while she tried to convince herself not to be sick from the terrible sensations that coursed through her.

He didn't break away from the kiss, and let his fingers slip around her waist, pulling her closer to him before sneaking up and massaging the small of her back lightly. His fingers traced over her bare skin before he slowly moved his hands down, his fingertips brushing the waistband of her panties before moving up her back. His fingers hooked into the back of her bra, tugging at it lightly and teasingly, though not allowing himself to remove it just yet.

"Are you?" He asked her lightly after the kiss had been broken, his breath falling close to her ear, "I would love to see that independent young woman take the rest of her clothes off, then."

"I'm not _that_ easy," Shelley insisted with a smirk, her fingers curling and uncurling behind his neck. "Let's see what you can do," She said, her voice just barely above a whisper. Grabbing him by the collar of his shirt again, she pulled him down with her onto the couch. She pressed her lips against his again, and let her hands trail slowly down the length of his arms before sharply taking hold of his wrists and holding his hands down, away from her. Age and

gender had nothing to do with it, she was still Shelley, still outrageously assertive, and still very much dominant in this situation.

He let himself fall slightly against her, groaning a little as she held his hands that way, his mouth finding a spot just below her chin, his lips kissing a wet trail down her neck and to the base of her collarbone, sucking on her skin lightly before pulling back a little, attempting to break his hands free from her. He continued his kisses down her chest, his lips playing softly on the skin just above her breasts, kisses landing just above the material of her bra.

"You have yet to see what I can do, dear Shelley," he promised her, his voice silky-smooth as he allowed himself to taste her skin, his head still dipping between her breasts as he continued to pull his hands from her surprisingly strong grasp.

Bad sex and foreplay twice in one day was a little much for Shelley, she had to admit, but she couldn't very well stop her plan when it was already in motion. Imitating a smirk, she dug her fingernails lightly into his wrists before abruptly releasing them. As she was about to speak, she was overcome with the strong desire to gag yet again. The feeling of his revolting saliva against her skin, and worse in her mouth, made her want to keel over the nearest toilet, wherever the hell that may be.

"Is that so?" She purred, her fingers working at the buttons of his shirt until she was effortlessly able to cast it aside, with a little compensation from him, of course. "Then, show me," Shelley urged him intriguingly, hoping that she didn't sound half as uninspired as she felt.

There was no vocal response from him; none was needed, not as he allowed his head to dip further and allowed his kisses to become wetter with each inch he descended further. His hands finally found her hips, setting her back slightly against the couch and crouching slightly so that he could explore her body further. His lips found the skin just above her belly button and he kissed her there lightly for a moment, his fingers skimming softly over her hips, tracing an aimless pattern as he let his tongue dart out to lick the skin.

Shelley bit her tongue with a vicious amount of force to keep herself from seriously gagging. However, as she heard the door open and saw a pleasantly familiar face in its threshold, she smirked again to herself. At an instant, she tilted her head back and moaned softly, the muscles in her stomach tensing as she let out a small, pleasurable giggle. By forcing herself to breathe more heavily along with her act, she made her face flush, and that was exactly what she was going for. If she couldn't enjoy what was going on presently, then she could at least get a kick out of the aftershock for all it was worth.

Amber had come here, to Corny's dressing room, fully expecting to find him, though not necessarily with a girl, particularly Shelley. As she threw the door open, her eyes narrowed and fell upon him, clearly kneeling and kissing down Shelley's body, only God knew what he was actually kissing. She sucked her breath in, her cheeks flushing instantly, as her gaze settled upon the similarly flushed redhead with her head tilted. She swallowed hard, clenching her teeth

silently, still watching them as Corny moved slightly, pushing Shelley's knees apart slightly as he knelt between them. She opened her mouth to speak as Corny chuckled softly, tracing his fingers down the insides of Shelley's thighs.

Shelley sighed in false ecstasy, and amazingly kept herself from shuddering in disgust as Corny pushed her knees apart. Grinning shrewdly, she found her eyes locked with Amber's for a moment. Letting her eyes fall shut once more, she moaned again, and curled her fingers against his shoulders.

"Oh, _God_, Corny, I love it when you use your mouth like that."

"What the hell!" She dug her nails into Corny's shoulder, pulling him back and nearly causing him to fall from his crouched position on the floor. He turned, his eyes wide at the sight of her and fully expecting to get an ear-full from the outraged blonde. She narrowed her eyes hatefully at him, then stepped dangerously close to Shelley, forcing Corny to relinquish his position between Shelley's legs for Amber to stand between them, pointing her finger accusingly down at the smirking redhead. "You are so damn stupid, do you know that? You think Corny actually believes that you're enjoying this?" She turned her head sharply to look at the older male, who watched her cautiously, "Corny, you stupid fuck, you think for one second that she's not lying to your face?" She scoffed in disgust at him.

"You're stupider than I thought if you think _that's_ what gets her off."

She shifted, turning back to Shelley suddenly, her eyes catching on her body for just a moment too long before she forced herself to look at Shelley's face, her eyes dark and narrow.

"You're such a lying little whore, Shelley," she sneered at her, her voice low and quiet, "You have nothing better to do than make every aspect of my life miserable, do you?" Her lips curled into a hard sneer as she leaned slightly over her, "Look at you, coming in here like a hooker, and for what, Shelley, so you can say you beat me at some kind of stupid ass game that you started?"

Shelley merely stared as Amber went off. Her expression was blank, and, even though she was in nothing, save her underclothes, she didn't even bother with trying to cover up. What would she be hiding from, anyway? Tilting her head slightly, she crossed her legs and folded her arms over her chest idly, one eyebrow raised. If Amber had expected any sort of reaction out of her, she would get nothing of the sortâ€”not yet, anyway.

Amber stared hard at her, her face flushed dark crimson, her breath coming in short, shallow gasps. She swallowed hard; it was an attempt to swallow down all of her emotion; her guilt and sadness, frustration and hatred. It was nearly beyond impossible, of course, for her face not to betray her. Her fingers curled into tight fists at her side, and she bit on her lip, drawing it into her mouth quickly, as she was certain the bitter taste that hit her suddenly was blood.

"You know what?" She glared at Shelley for another minute, then

glanced back at Corny, shaking her head, "Fuck this, and fuck both of you." She turned, swallowing again as she started toward the door and then turned sharply on her heels, "No, better yet, just stay here and _fuck_ each other. Because neither of you deserve better than the dumb-asses that you both are."

Throughout the silence that enveloped the room and the fierce remarks from Amber, Shelley just sat there, uncertain of how she was supposed to react. She kept her eyes away from Corny, and, instead, locked onto Amber's angry and hurt gaze. At that moment, she could say that she felt some sort of pang within her, but as to what it was exactly, she hadn't the faintest idea.

Once Amber left, Shelley stifled a small sigh, and then finally let her vacant eyes wander back towards Corny. She lifted herself up and got behind him, her lips lingering dangerously close to his ear, as her hands rested on either shoulder. Feigning a smirk, she purred softly into his ear.

"Don't let her bother you," She started to say, her eyes narrowing. "She's just a minor inconvenience; she always has been."

He allowed himself to smirk as she said the words, then shook his head.

"No, not a minor inconvenience. She's a huge pain in the ass. I would expect you of all people to recognize that, Shelley." He turned his head a little to look at her, "But she's not important. Never has been, never will be. Let her be pissed; it will keep her out of our hair for a little while." He moaned softly at the feeling of her fingertips against his shoulders, "Believe me, when you hurt precious little Amber's feelings, she doesn't come crawling back for more."

Shelley had to force herself not to cringe or seethe with rage at the things that he was saying. It took a strong bundle of willpower not to grab him by the hair and hiss and yell at him until she was inevitably satisfied.

"Enough about Amber," She said coldly, after a few moments of silence. "I did not come here to talk about her," Shelley curled her fingertips against his neck and kept her lips near his ear. "_I'm_ the one who has your undivided attention."

He growled quietly, turning his head to look at her before shifting, moving and allowing his hands to skim down her sides again, his fingertips brushing her smooth skin.

"Yes," he nodded his head slowly, his voice quiet, silky smooth, just as it was with Amber, and every other girl. "You have my complete undivided attentionâ€|" he kissed the base of her neck again, trailing his way up to her ear and whispering the words to her quietly, "And stillâ€| I can think of two things that I'd really like to seeâ€| divided."

Shelley sucked in her breath sharply, and then smirked at him, her eyes giving the illusion of interest. She pursed her lips and side-glanced him as he spoke, a sinister glint in her eyes.

"Yes, of course," She promised, her voice low as she leaned up and

began whispering to him. "Oh, but, by the wayâ€¦ I've been meaning to tell you something."

He smirked at her, his eyes connecting with hers, and lowered his head a little, keeping his face close to hers.

"Yes?"

Narrowing her eyes again, she pressed her lips directly adjacent to his ear.

"I wouldn't have sex with you if you were the last person on earth, Corny," She said bitterly, her fingernails digging into his shoulder as she shoved him away from her harshly, and stood. Shelley tipped her nose in the air as she pushed her way out the door, scooped up her dress, and then slammed his dressing room door behind her. Quickly and fiercely throwing her dress back on, she paused to sigh and glance around the studio. She had accomplished what she had come to do, but she still couldn't shake a certain feeling from her.

Pulling her sweater around her, she began towards the stage door, and then slowly pushed it open. Narrowing her eyes a bit, she glanced around the parking lot for her car. Just as her eyes were about to sweep over it, they were ensnared by a flash of bright colors, flawless blonde hair, and pure, revealing blue eyes. Holding her breath for a moment, she made her way out the door in a hurried and disoriented fashion.

Amber pulled her sweater around her as well, her eyes connecting with Shelley's for only a moment as she looked away from her, the wind whipping against her with such force that she almost felt as if she would blow away. She squinted her eyes against the cool wind, then turned back to look at Shelley. God damnit, why was her mother taking so long to get here? The one day she was more than desperate to escape this living hell of a studio was the day she decided not to show up. Amber tasted a bitterness in her mouth, and thought for a moment that she might throw up as she watched Shelley walk.

"He must be getting faster," she said the words to no one in particular, and tried to convince herself that she hadn't just walked in on that scene; hadn't seen his hands on her, hadn't seen her tanned, flawless body writhing at his touch. She let her gaze brush the ground for a moment, and then raised her eyes, catching Shelley's own pale eyes. As much as it hurt her, she forced herself to stare into the same eyes that she'd gazed into so many days; so many nights. She clenched her jaw and allowed herself to stare at the redhead, her hands curling into fists on her lap.

Shelley glanced back at Amber briefly before getting into her car. She had just barely heard what she said, and she kept herself from hissing in revulsion. Amber could think whatever the hell she wanted for all that Shelley cared. Sighing, she started the car and headed off in a seemingly random direction. Wherever she decided to go, it wouldn't be home.

As Shelley drove away, Amber pulled the sweater slightly in front of her face, dipping her head to bury it in the soft fabric. Like this, she could pretend that she was merely shielding herself from the wind, until her mother arrived.

Sitting on that bench, buried within herself, Amber used the cloth of her sweater to wipe the single fallen tear from her cheek.

Of course it didn't matter. It wasn't the first, nor would it be the last time she found herself crying over Shelley. Though at that moment, she made a vow to herself that as long as Shelley could force herself not to care about what they had, Amber could, too.

Shelley was the one, after all, who had taught Amber everything she knew about lying to herself.

6. Ticking Like A Clock

****Tracy****: I love this story, among other things, so much that it makes my heart hurt. This is pretty much my favorite chapter so far, and I have a feeling the story's only going to get better from here.

****Kelsey Rose****: This is definitely my favorite chapter, too! Amber and Shelley both really break my heart sometimes. :(

* * *

>It had been three days since the incident with Corny, and Shelley had kept her distance from both Corny and Amber. She wasn't too quick to go leaping back into either of their arms. Shelley had far too much pride for that. However, something had kept her awake, tossing and turning, each night, if only for an hour or so. Though she would rather die than admit wrongdoing, she still felt a certain tug in her chest each time she thought about the situation. <p>That would probably explain why she had just parked her car outside of Amber's house and gotten out, with something tucked beneath her arm. With her fingers occasionally fondling the pack of cigarettes in her long leather jacket's pocket, she walked up to the door, her expression vacant. She knew that Amber probably wouldn't be too happy to see her, but she had reminded herself time and time again that she didn't care. Sighing in slight exasperation, she knocked on the door, and stood, impatiently waiting for a response, from Amber, her mother, or whoever the hell happened to appear.<p>

Amber heard the knock on the door, though at the moment, she didn't recognize it as that. Tammy was sprawled, stomach-down on her bed, studying her fingernails as she spoke, glancing up at Amber who sat absentmindedly at the vanity stool across the other girls, watching her friends blankly.

"Did you see him?" Tammy asked incredulously, before glancing at Lou Ann, then back at Amber. "I mean, he was just standing there flirting with her. It was like he didn't even see me standing there." Her voice was quiet, and her eyes connected with Amber's face. Amber kept her gaze blank, focusing on nothing in particular, and when Tammy got no reaction from the blonde, she averted her gaze to Lou Ann, who nodded sympathetically.

"Yeahâ€¦" Lou Ann crossed her legs beneath her, "Boys can be real jerks." Both girls took the opportunity to glance towards Amber; it was a moment for her to break into the conversation, though when she made no comment, they went back to their own chatter.

"He looked nice, though," Tammy offered encouragingly, "He knows I love it when he wears that shirt, so maybe that's why he did."

"Probably," Lou Ann nodded again, combing her fingers through her dark hair, "What do you think, Amber?" Their eyes moved to the blonde girl again, who sat idly on her vanity stool, her blue eyes focused on anything but the two girls in front of her.

"Hm?" She asked, her cheeks suddenly dark at the idea of being caught so off-guard by the girls, who sat staring at her with blank expressions, "Oh, yeah, that shirt. Yeah, you're probably right, Lou Ann. I wouldn't worry about it if I were you, Tammy."

She was suddenly thankful that she'd mastered the art of half-listening in school, and the girls seemed satisfied with her answer.

While the girls continued on with their conversations upstairs in Amber's room, Shelley stood outside the front door, practically fuming. Narrowing her eyes at the idea of having to wait any longer for Amber or someone to appear, she cursed under her breath, and then knocked once again on the door, though ten times more fiercely than before. If she didn't come to the door this time, she could just forget her whole purpose for coming here.

This time, the rap on the door interrupted the conversation in the bedroom, and all three girls grew quiet. Amber bit on her lip, waving her hand dismissively as she pushed herself to her feet and walked through the bedroom.

"It's just the door, I'll get it," she disappeared into the hall, "I'll be right back."

Her feet carried her down the steps and into the living room. She rested her hand on the doorknob for a moment before pulling it open, her breath catching in her throat at the sight of the girl on the porch. Her first instinct was to pull her into a hug, though she knew with Shelley, that was never an appropriate action. Instead, she crossed her arms over her chest, swallowed hard, and tried to slow the sudden increase of her heart rate. She forced a dark smirk upon her features, raising her eyebrows slightly

"What do you want, Shelley? Corny's not here, if he's what you're looking for."

Shelley sneered and pushed her way past Amber. She walked inside and carelessly tossed a bouquet of six red roses on her kitchen counter top, as well as a very plain-looking card, that had basically just been plucked off the shelf at random and signed.

"Funny," She muttered, clearly not amused by her alleged 'joke.' "I came here to see you, actually, but since you're obviously in such a bitchy mood, I guess I made a huge mistake."

Amber stepped back as Shelley pushed past her, her eyes following the card and roses as Shelley tossed them on the counter.

"You came here to see me?" She couldn't help but be a little

surprised. She narrowed her eyes a little, walking silently over to the card and picking it up. She slid her finger under the envelope, tore it open carefully, and let her eyes read the card before placing it back on the counter. She studied the roses for a moment, then turned, gazing at Shelley. She stood unsurely for a moment, then moved slowly towards the other girl, her heart pounding in her chest. She allowed her arms to move slowly around her, offering her a stiff hug before pulling away. "Thank you."

As Amber read the card, Shelley took to either watching her, or glancing around the living area absentmindedly. She wasn't typically one for straightforward affections; so, as the blonde came over and slipped her arms awkwardly around her, she merely stood there, waiting until the hug was over with.

"Sure," She commented dismissively, while her hands rested in front of her waist. After silently debating with herself about what to say next, she stared at Amber, as though she were considering what the response could possibly be before she even bothered to ask. "So, what are you doing?"

"Uh, nothing," Amber replied quickly, before remembering the girls upstairs, "Oh, Tammy and Lou Ann are here. They're talking aboutâ€¦" she thought for a moment, before looking at Shelley, "God, I don't even know what they're talking about." She smiled a little, still watching Shelley's face, and hoping that the redhead couldn't see the blush that was rising in her cheeks. "Uh, what about you?" She swallowed hard, looking away from her for a moment in an attempt to calm her pounding heart, "What have you been up to the last few days?"

Shelley managed to keep an unfazed expression as Amber mentioned that Tammy and Lou Ann were upstairs. However, on the inside, jealousy stung viciously at the walls of her stomach. Turning her gaze, she shrugged her shoulders, hardly bothering to take any notice to Amber as she stared off at nothing in particular.

"Nothing of interest or great importance," She crossed her arms over her chest. Shelley wanted to just send her away, for whatever complex reason, but, for some reason, her mouth just wouldn't open again to get the words out.

If it had been anyone else, Amber would have teased them about the flowers, and the card. She would have prodded until she got a better apology, but with Shelley, everything was different. The fact that she had taken the time to actually get anything for her, much less wait on the front porch until Amber opened the door, spoke volumes. She smiled slightly, turning her body a little, unconsciously allowing her body to move into a flirtatious stance, her arms hanging at her side.

"I'm sure that's not exactly true." She curled her fingers into loose fists to keep herself from reaching out to touch the other girl, "You're always up to something, Shelley." Her voice was low and flirtatious, and she realized it too late. She cleared her throat a little, then looked away. "So, uhâ€¦" her mind raced with questions, all of which had to do with Link, Corny, or school, and none of them which she really wanted to know the answer to, "Do you want to come upstairs for a little while? Say hi to the girls?"

Hearing that all too recognizable, flirtatious undertone to Amber's voice, Shelley couldn't help but let her eyes wander over to her. The way that she presented herself now was painfully enticing, but Shelley convinced herself that she had a stronger willpower than that. Swallowing her nerves away, she curled and uncurled her fingers.

"I don't care," She spoke confidently and indifferently, and let her shoulders fall again, as she began the agonizingly familiar path towards Amber's room.

Amber nodded slightly, turning towards the steps and beginning to climb them. Her hand traced over the railing slightly, and when they reached the hallway leading to her bedroom, she paused, turning back to Shelley so quickly that they nearly collided.

"Let me get the vase first," she requested gently, suddenly unable to make eye contact with her, "So they don'tâ€¦ you know, ask questions about where the flowers came from." She laughed a little, nervously, "I'd hate to have to explain that one." She swallowed hard, taking another step towards her bedroom, still watching Shelley, "So justâ€¦ stay here for a minute, okay?"

Shelley's heart twisted as she heard Amber talk about explaining where the flowers came from. Though her face didn't betray her, she was still worried that her inner emotional slip-up went noticed. Biting her tongue, she kept her usual scowl on her face as she watched Amber slip into her room.

When Amber disappeared into the bedroom, her feet carried her hurriedly through the bedroom, past the ongoing chatter between Tammy and Lou Ann.

"Amber, what are you doing?" Tammy wondered curiously from her spot on the bed, watching the blonde, "Whatcha looking for?"

"Uh," she hesitated for a moment, throwing her closet doors open and beginning to rummage through a box at the bottom of the closet, "A vase."

"Ooh," Lou Ann squealed softly, perking up suddenly, "Did some cute boy bring you flowers, Amber?" Tammy cooed suddenly as well, pushing herself off her stomach and tucking her legs beneath her.

"No!" Amber shot back suddenly, her fingers brushing over the glass vase immediately, curling her fingers around it before she turned back to them. "Nobody brought me flowers. They wereâ€¦ it was a delivery for my mother, okay?" She kept her voice low, watching her friends.

"Mhm," Tammy smiled knowingly, nodding, "Then, who were you downstairs talking to?"

Amber took a breath, then shook her head.

"Oh, that. No, that's no one. Well, I mean, Shelley's here, but she's--"

"Shelley?" Lou Ann cut Amber off mid-sentence, "What's that tramp doing here?"

Tammy laughed suddenly, her eyes widening at Lou Ann's words before she looked to the blonde, whose cheeks had already flushed dark pink.

"Yeah, Amber, what's she doing here?" She glanced toward the open door, her eyes scanning what she could see of the hallway, "Doesn't she know there are no boys here? No one here to spread her legs for," she laughed lightly, as if she realized how cruel her words must have sounded.

"Ooh," Lou Ann looked toward Tammy suddenly, "Who would want her anyway? I mean, she's cheaper than Brenda, just a little smarter, apparently."

Amber bit on her lip, her fingers curling tighter around the vase.

"I don't think-" Amber began quietly, desperately praying that Shelley had suddenly gone deaf and wouldn't be able to hear any of this conversation, "She just came by to drop something off."

The other girls snickered loudly, and Amber felt the blush rising in her cheeks.

"Well, tell her we don't want what she's offering," Lou Ann remarked smartly, glaring at both of the girls, "God, Amber, she's so disgusting. Really, tell her to go home."

"Well, she's not-" Amber started to speak again, but Tammy's low voice cut her off.

"Amber," she chided her gently, and their eyes met, "Shelley is everything that people say about her. We all know that." She pursed her lips a little, her eyes growing wide, "She's a bitch!" Tammy hesitated, her voice lowering slightly, "Well, she's a bitch, Amber."

"Yeah, a bitch," Lou Ann confirmed, louder this time, "You should know that, Amber. She's basically the only one standing between you and what you want." She scoffed a little, "Yeah, except for that fat girl."

Tammy giggled a little before turning her attention back to Amber, who stood still, holding the vase.

"But really, Amber, don't invite her up here. She's such a drag." She thought for a moment, "Just lie to her. Tell her we're getting ready to go home, anyway, and that we won't be here that much longer." She shrugged nonchalantly, "She doesn't need to know we're spending the night."

Lou Ann nodded in agreement.

"She also doesn't need to know that we all hate her," she laughed a little, "Not that it's anything new. She acts like you want her to be here or something," she sneered, "Obviously that's not the case." She was quiet for a moment, "I mean, you don't want her to be here, do you?"

Amber stood still for a moment, her tongue darting out to wet her lips. It took her a moment to find her voice, and she shook her head, her blue eyes narrowing into hateful slits.

"Well, no. I mean, of course I don't want her to be here. I wouldn't even have opened the door if I'd known it was her," she lied blatantly, already feeling the knots in her stomach, "I'll just tell her to get the hell away." She nodded once, and the girls squealed victoriously as Amber darted out of the room, "I'll be right back."

Contrary to what Amber wanted to believe, Shelley had heard every hateful, damnable word from those girls and even from Amber herself. However, she was set on not letting any of it bother her; that is, until she heard Amber's words. What a lying, wannabe, back-stabbing, little whore of a bitch. Shelley's lips peeled back in a snarl, and she was gone before Amber even thought about coming out of her room.

She snatched a single cigarette from her pocket, grabbed a lighter from her purse, and then swiftly lit it and placed it between her rosy lips as she made a v-line for the door. Shelley was obviously not wanted here; therefore, she sure as hell didn't want to be here. The redhead had always felt a certain pang of jealousy and even hatred for Lou Ann and Tammy, and this little visit had only furthered her point. Even still, what hurt the most was that Amber had agreed with them. For someone as hardhearted as Shelley, it was foreign to her that she had actually felt angry, hurt tears being to form in the depths of her eyes. In spite of this, she had kept them at bay, if only because she wasn't about to give Amber, or those girls the satisfaction of seriously hurting her.

Before Amber even hit the hallway, she knew Shelley would be gone. She could chalk it up to years of knowing the other girl, or the redhead's pride, but deep inside she knew that no sane person would stand there and allow themselves to be insulted by a group of their peers, especially by the one person that should never have taken part in it.

Without thinking, she raced down the steps, still clutching the vase in her hands. She pushed through the front door, racing down the porch steps and onto the sidewalk, calling the other girl's name as she spotted her on the street.

"Shelley!" She rushed across the street, narrowly avoiding the oncoming traffic. "Shelley, wait up!"

Shelley turned around sharply and glared ferociously at Amber, the cigarette still tucked between her lips. Catching it between her index and middle fingers, she blew a puff of smoke past her lips, and scoffed.

"What the fuck do you want, Amber?" She narrowed her eyes. "Oh, right, I know: to tell me 'to get the hell away.'" Shelley kept the vicious scowl on her face. "Well, it's unnecessary, because I was just leaving, anyway."

Amber sucked her breath in, waving her hand ferociously in front of her face to clear the smoke.

"No, I didn't-" She swallowed hard, then reached for the cigarette between Shelley's fingers, barely avoiding being burned in the process before she dropped it to the pavement, crushing it beneath her shoe, much to Shelley's annoyance. "I don't know why you picked up that nasty habit, Shelley. You're going to kill yourself. And you know I didn't mean that! God, you've always prided yourself on being a heartless bitch and now you're crying over what Tammy and Lou Ann said?" She narrowed her eyes, watching her as the wind blew past them, ruffling their skirts. She brushed the hair behind her ears, still glaring at Shelley.

Shelley practically hissed at her.

"Do I look like I'm crying to you?" She wrinkled her nose angrily and snatched another cigarette from her pocket; although, this time, she waited to light it, since she knew that Amber would probably just end up spoiling this one, as well. "I'm just pissed that I took time out of my day just to come here and listen to bullshit like this, at your house, of all places."

"No, you're not crying, Shelley, you're feeling sorry for yourself which is even worse in your case. You act like some damn saint, when you lie to my face all the damn time, Shelley! You go out of your way to fuck with me. You're telling me this shit that happened between you and Corny wasn't supposed to hurt me?"

Shelley paused, her face holding the outraged expression fervently.

"After this, I really don't know if I care that it hurt you," She lowered her voice, even though she was almost completely certain that they were alone. "Amber, I'm sick of actually trying with you, when you just prove to me over and over again that I'm so much better than all of this," Shelley glowered at her. "You're such a two-faced little slut, that I'm just so close to giving up with you. I'm sick of going on some rollercoaster ride of emotions with you; it just fucks everything up even more, and it's all your damn fault."

Though it was more out of irony than anything else, Amber laughed loudly, watching her still.

"You have got to be fucking kidding me, Shelley! You are trying with me?" She sneered at her, snatching the unlit cigarette from Shelley's hand, throwing it behind them into a bush on the sidewalk, "Stop with the fucking cigarettes, would you? Are you asking to die? That's so disgusting. I would never kiss anyone who smokes, it's going to rot your teeth out." She grasped Shelley's wrist, "I don't get what makes you so much fucking better than me. I really don't. You're allowed to do whatever the hell you want to me, and the second I say anything about you, something that's not even true, you take off running like a scalded dog with your tail between your legs. Don't you think that's a little hypocritical, Shelley?"

Shelley's eyes didn't let up with any of the intensity in them. All the same, there was a glint of offense within their intricate depths. She pursed her lips, and then sighed in frustration. This was one of those rare moments where she had no idea what the hell to say. Amber was pulling every single insult from the book and throwing it right back at Shelley, and she didn't know what to do. Luckily, though, it was just the two of them, so she didn't have to worry about showing

any sort of weakness in front of anyone, save Amber.

As she stared at Amber, her eyebrows furrowed, she wanted so badly just to let everything go, but she just couldn't. Shelley did not cry; it wasn't something that she did, wanted to do, or even encouraged of herself or others. She knew it was entirely spinelessly and weak, and those were the last two things she ever wanted to be. Regardless of all of that, and despite the fierceness that she was showing before Amber right now, there was almost a diffident sort of pain that shone through her, something that only Amber would be able to detect. Still, she recklessly shoved that aside, and took to worsening her scowl, virtually growling at Amber, as she turned her face from her.

"Whatever," She decided finally. "I just really do not care anymore, Amber. I don't."

"You can't make me believe that for a second," she breathed the words, her lips mere centimeters from Shelley's, "You make me so angry, Shelley." Her breath was shallow now, and her eyes were dark as she studied Shelley's profile. "And there is nothing in this world that I would like more right now than to-" she paused. What was it exactly that she wanted at this moment? Even after everything, she wasn't interested in hurting her again; she didn't want to see that pain in those pale eyes. After taking a moment to glare at her, she raised her hands, grasping Shelley's face tightly, turning it towards her as she met her lips in a fierce kiss, her mouth ravaging the redhead's, sighing slightly as she pressed her lips hard against the other girl's. This. This was exactly what they both needed.

Shelley kept herself from squealing in shock or surprise as Amber grabbed her face. Though, even as angry as she still was, she melted very quickly into the kiss. Reluctant to let her hands move from her sides, she deepened the kiss, her fingers just barely brushing against the fabric of Amber's dress, near her hips. She moved her teeth tactfully against Amber's bottom lip, and then suddenly and even desperately grasped at the front of the blonde's dress as she drew her towards her. The kiss continued on hungrily, and she sighed softly as she lightly pressed against her. She had missed Amber's touch so much, that her body was very literally aching as she craved for more from her.

Amber let herself sigh against Shelley's lips, and even moaned softly as she felt her hands pulling at her dress. As angry as she was; as much as she wished she could erase this fight between them, it felt so good to be in her arms again. It was addictive, and she couldn't believe how amazing Shelley's lips tasted; better than Corny's, better than anyone she'd ever kissed. Shelley had, somehow unconsciously, already managed to stake her claim in Amber's mind, and heart.

With great reluctance, Amber forced herself to pull away from the kiss after a few moments. She sighed heavily, keeping her eyes locked on Shelley's face, and a smirk pulled across her lips.

"I like when our fights end like this," she swiped a thumb near Shelley's lip, erasing her lipstick smudges, "And right now, I don't even care if you think you hate me, because I know you don't."

Shelley hesitated for a moment after the kiss, still wonderfully dazed from it. Smirking, she ran her own thumb against the skin near Amber's lips to wipe the lipstick from it. It was a slightly humorous activity that seemed to follow a good bit of their secret meetings.

"I don't," She purred, staying close to Amber. Shelley longed to kiss her again so badly, but she knew that it probably wasn't a good idea, because then they would never be able to leave one another. "I could never," She said quietly, her own voice hinting how surprised she was to have let that slip. Feeling her cheeks burn in the most uncharacteristic of ways, she regained her composure by moving away from Amber and standing back to look at her collectedly.

"They'll be suspicious," She said vacantly, her expression inwardly reflecting how pissed, torn, and frustrated she was as she practically demanded that Amber go back to her deceitful guests.

"Let them wonder where we went," she whispered softly into the other girl's ear, "They'll just think we're scratching the shit out of each other in the middle of the street." Her breath was warm against Shelley's ear, "Only we have to know what really goes on between us."

Of course, bedroom windows, especially those that face the street, can be one's greatest enemy. As Amber and Shelley huddled there on the sidewalk, their fingers entwined, their heart rates quick simply by being so intimately close to each other after so long, they had no reason to suspect that Amber's guests had seen the entire display of affection.

They had no reason to suspect that, in that rare moment of happiness between them, they had created bigger problems together than either of them could have ever caused alone.

7. You're Nothing More

****Kelsey Rose:**** Hi! Yay! And yada yada. It's almost Valentine's Day. Heeheeeee.

****Tracy:**** We had, like, 95 percent of this chapter finished the DAY after the last one, I swear. It just took us a few weeks to get the last page together! And that it is, baby. Hehe.

* * *

>It was hard to pull herself away from Shelley's hold, and she gave her another soft smile before leaning in again, placing a gentle kiss on her lips. She couldn't even begin to convince herself to care that they were on the sidewalk still, and could easily be seen by anyone who happened to wander down this street. This rare moment of tranquility between them was too great to sacrifice.<p><p>

"This is how it should be, you know, with me and you?" She whispered the words to her, her fingers playing lightly upon the neckline of her dress, "It's so much better like this." Her face flushed a little, but she didn't move to pull away. Her hands caught Shelley's

again, curling her fingers around the other girl's, holding their hands together. "I don't like fighting with you all the time, Shel."

Shelley was still hesitant, given their current placement outside. She kept that characteristic serenity and poise as she let Amber take hold of her hands, but she never once pulled away or denied her. Watching Amber in pleasant silence, she coiled her fingers against the palm of the blonde's hand and blinked her eyes slowly, as though she didn't know what to say in response to what she had said. In actuality, it was exactly that, but Shelley's face never gave any sort of hint to it. Instead, she sighed quietly and tightened her grip on Amber's hand.

"Amber," She said, her voice still low as she debated her choice of words.

Amber watched her with wide blue eyes, narrowing them slightly in question.

"What?"

There were a million different things that Shelley could have said, but almost all of them made her shy away. She averted her eyes for a moment, and then glanced back towards Amber, her eyes deceptive to how unclear she actually felt.

"You're staying over at my house tomorrow night," She said simply, her eyes narrowing much like Amber's as she surveyed her with an extremely vague sense of fondness in her eyes. Even though they had just had a fierce blowout and fight, she was determined, for once, to not let her anger get the better of her like it did everyday.

Amber let a grin slip across her face, and nodded.

"Okay," she agreed easily, her voice still quiet. She clutched Shelley's hands, swinging them slightly. Her teeth chewed lightly on her bottom lip, still watching Shelley's eyes. "I'd love that."

She dipped her head a little, placing another quick kiss on her cheek.

"I should probably get back upstairs." The words hurt her to say, even, but she kept her eyes locked on Shelley. She wanted to say so many things; wanted to offer to completely abandon the two girls in her bedroom, and ask Shelley to take her, wherever it was she was going from here. She smiled a little, nodding encouragingly at her, "I can't wait until tomorrow."

From the time she placed the kiss on her cheek, Shelley had simply taken to standing. In public, she always had difficulties being open and affectionate with Amber; it was really nothing new, because that was how it had always been. It was just how she was. She would still try to dominate the situation, while still backing off to a certain degree, if she was able.

"Mhm," She mumbled softly, before nodding her head to Amber. "See you tomorrow, Amber," Her voice was distant as she turned her back, her fingers unenthusiastically brushing over the cigarettes in her coat pocket. She denied herself one as she got into her car and sat

there for a moment, watching Amber silently. Shelley stayed like that for a second before averting her eyes, starting the car, and driving off, leaving Amber to do whatever she pleased with those two wannabes. She just had to get away from there, and continue to pretend that it didn't make her crazy with jealousy.

Amber couldn't push the smile from her face as she made her way across the street, and through the front door of her house. She took a moment to herself, in order to place the roses in a vase, and let the heat fade from her cheeks as she did so. Once the roses had been placed safely in the vase, she carried them carefully up the stairs and took a moment to let her smile fade before making her way into her bedroom. The girls stood staring at her, their eyes wide, and she offered them a tight smile.

"Well. Now that _that's _all taken care ofâ€|" she placed the roses absentmindedly on her dresser, wiping her palms on her skirt, trying to ignore the burning blush that remained in her cheeks, "What did I miss? Any good gossip?" She perched carefully on the edge of the bed, but the two girls remained standing by the window, their arms held behind their backs.

"Uh, Amber," Lou Ann spoke after a long moment, her eyes darting suspiciously towards Tammy, then back at the blonde, "What the hell was that?"

Amber blanched suddenly, swallowing hard, and tucking her legs beneath her on the bed, pulling her skirt over her feet.

"What wasâ€|" she paused, looking expectantly between the girls, "_what_?"

Tammy continued to stare, in shock, at Lou Ann, her eyes still wide from what she had seen. She honestly had no idea what to say, especially when something as unexpected as that had just happened right before their very eyes. Nudging Lou Ann gently with her arm, she stared over at Amber, trying her hardest not to let the look of disgust get too out of hand on her expression.

"You know," Tammy said softly, "whatever that," She glanced blankly towards the window before looking back to Lou Ann, and then Amber. "was."

Amber swallowed hard, letting her tongue dart out to wet her lips before chewing on her bottom lip, the heat rising in her cheeks as she watched them.

"Oh, that," she waved her hand dismissively, "No, that was justâ€|that was something we do, you know, it was justâ€|" she felt her heart beginning to pound in her chest, and shook her head, "no, that wasn't what it looked like."

"Really?" Lou Ann asked suddenly, glancing at Tammy again, making no effort to move towards Amber or the bed, "Because it looked like you and Shelley wereâ€|" She sneered suddenly, shuddering in disgust, "Were youâ€| _kissing_ her, Amber?"

Amber's mouth dropped, and she shook her head quickly, shifting uncomfortably on the bed.

"No! No, I told you, it wasn't-"

"We're not blind," Lou Ann cut her off, "We saw the entire thing."

"We saw everything," Tammy shuddered, as well, her eyebrows lowering as she stared at the blonde. Alike Lou Ann, she wasn't keen on moving so close to her, not after what they had just witnessed. "Amber, what was that?" There was a pause, and then, "Besides being absolutely disgusting!" She shrieked slightly and softly in horror at the mental images that ran through her head, and then narrowed her eyes unbelievably at Amber.

"Iâ€¦I don't-" Amber shook her head slowly, her mouth suddenly as dry as cotton, "It wasn'tâ€¦I mean, it-"

"Is that why you asked us to spend the night here?" Lou Ann shrieked suddenly, her eyes growing even wider, "Amber, we're notâ€¦" she glanced at Tammy, a disgusted sneer upon her face, "We're notâ€¦ lesbians, even if you are. That's disgusting."

"No!" Amber shrieked suddenly, her eyes growing wide, brimming with tears. She stood quickly, and both girls scattered, pushing away from her as she neared them. "I didn't! I'm notâ€¦I'm not one of those!"

"Right," Lou Ann sneered, "You just kiss girls because you have nothing better to do?" She rolled her eyes meanly, "I'm not staying here tonight. I don't want to sleep in a room with a lesbian, do you, Tammy?"

Tammy kept her eyebrows furrowed as she looked from Amber to Lou Ann to Amber, and then finally back to Lou Ann again. She had scrambled away from Amber alongside Lou Ann, her mouth wide in disbelief as she stumbled over what to say, or do. Pausing momentarily after Lou Ann asked the question, she began biting the inside of her mouth before backing up.

"No," She said, her voice very low and timid. "Noâ€¦ of course I don't!"

Lou Ann looked towards her, then shook her head quickly.

"I didn't think so. Come on, Tammy, let's go." They began to gather their things, their heads dipped low as they attempted to shove their belongings back into their bags.

"Girls, you don't have to go," Amber begged them suddenly, her cheeks flushing crimson, "Really, you don't!"

"Right," Lou Ann snapped at her, standing suddenly, jerking her bag onto her shoulder, "Cause you wanted to make a move on us? You're disgusting, Amber." She turned suddenly, eyeing the roses, then looked back to Amber. "And you're a liar, too! Did your nasty girlfriend bring you those?" She looked toward Amber quickly, then lashed out with her hand, knocking the vase onto the wooden floor, shattering it into millions of pieces.

Amber gasped suddenly, and looked up at Lou Ann with tear-filled eyes.

"Fine! Get the fuck out, then, both of you!" She felt the rage boiling beneath her skin, and pushed Lou Ann suddenly, causing her to stumble on the glass before pushing Tammy's shoulder as well, "Just stay the hell away from me!"

"Don't worry, we will," Lou Ann vowed from the hallway, as Tammy scurried after her, her lips pursed tightly together. As the two girls were making their way towards the front door downstairs, they paused in mid-step at the sight of Shelley pushing the door open and readjusting her coat. The redhead stared up at them maliciously, her expression challenging either one of them to try anything.

Lou Ann sighed, rolling her eyes before pushing past Shelley and heading down the steps. Tammy was slightly hesitant, but followed after Lou Ann, clutching her purse to her as they scurried down the sidewalk, muttering to themselves.

In her bedroom, Amber knelt on the floor, tears stinging her eyes. She used her fingers to pick the large pieces of glass off the wood, letting them fall into a wastebasket before pushing herself from her knees. She moved toward the open doorway, intending to make her way to the kitchen to retrieve the broom. She sighed softly, chewing on her bottom lip in a desperate attempt to push the tears back from her eyes, though when her eyes fell upon Shelley, her face flushed darker, and she swallowed hard. Her initial reaction, despite the fact that she knew Shelley would be upset that they had been seen by the girls because of Amber's stupid actions, was a mixture of fear and shame. She lowered her eyes suddenly, horribly ashamed of the fact that the flowers she had given her only moments before were now laying in a watery mess on the floor.

She crossed her arms over her chest, her blue eyes brimming with tears. Her teeth chewed on her bottom lip, and she shook her head, unable to meet Shelley's gaze.

"I knowâ€|" she said softly, her voice already breaking, "I'm sorry."

Shelley stood there in silence for a few moments. She had her assumptions, and with the girls gone so quickly, she could only speculate even further. Sighing somewhat, she dropped her hands to her sides and slowly advanced towards Amber. She stood before her, her eyes looking her over.

"Amber, don't say you're sorry," She directed her firmly, one of her hands moving to rest against her own hip. "You're not sorry, and I'm not sorry. You, of all people, should know that."

Amber nodded a little, though couldn't raise her eyes to look at Shelley.

"I need a broom," she said the words softly, her eyes grazing the floor, "Theyâ€|" she paused, swallowing hard, then bent to pick up the roses, stroking them gently with her fingers, "Lou Ann broke my vase." She blinked back the tears, then finally allowed her eyes to meet Shelley's. "I didn't mean for this to happen."

Staring down at the roses on the floor, she mulled over something constructive to say. Shrugging her shoulders, she glanced back at

Amber and narrowed her eyes.

"Don't cry," She stared her down, her gaze unwavering. "You're letting those stupid girls get the better of you. You're a Von Tussle," Shelley brushed past Amber, keeping her back to her. "Show some backbone."

Amber pursed her lips, crossing her arms over her chest, letting her gaze drop to the flowers again.

"I need a broom," she repeated, letting her feet carry her downstairs to the kitchen. She grasped the handle, carrying it back upstairs with her. Once she reached her doorway, she allowed herself to study Shelley's profile before kneeling to sweep the glass into the dustpan, emptying it in the wastebasket. She stood then, crossed her arms over her chest once again, and frowned.

"These flowers are going to die," she observed quietly, then glanced back at Shelley, "Why did you come back?"

"I thought I left something," Shelley stated plainly, her shoulders falling in another shrug. She turned back around to watch Amber as she continued to sweep up the broken pieces. "Don't worry about them," Her voice was inexpressive and almost uncaring as she stared the fallen roses over.

Amber glanced up at her, her eyes dark.

"I do, though," she said softly, looking at the flowers sadly, "It's not every day I get a gift from you, you know. Especially not for an apology." She paused for a moment before smirking and taking another step closer to her, "You know something?"

"They're just flowers, Amber," Shelley looked at her in sarcastic skepticism, and then quirked an eyebrow as she began to edge towards her. "What?"

Amber turned the rose around in her fingers, careful to avoid the thorns, and glanced up at Shelley, smiling rather coyly as she moved even closer.

"We may regret them seeing that kiss in the long run," she said softly, then lifted the flower, brushing its soft petals against Shelley's lips before leaning closer. "But right now, I'm glad they're gone."

Shelley stared at the flower uncertainly, and then watched Amber with a new, veiled curiosity. Letting her nose wrinkle slightly from the feeling of the petals against her lips, she managed a small smirk, and then tactfully snatched the rose from her. Grasping Amber by the wrist with one hand, and then on one hip with the other, she pressed her lips heatedly against hers, while letting her hand travel slowly and deliberately up her side, the fingers curling occasionally.

Amber let herself melt into the kiss, goose bumps pricking her skin as Shelley traced her fingers over her skin. She sighed a little, happily, as she felt Shelley's hand on her hip. She smirked, returning the kiss, then shifted slightly, encouraging Shelley to move towards the bed.

"Sit," she encouraged her softly, somewhat reluctant to break the kiss at all.

Shelley went with Amber's physical instructions, and slowly backed up towards the bed. Sustaining her hold on the other girl, she sat down with the blonde, her mouth still ravaging over Amber's in an intensely passionate kiss. All of her frustration, anger, distress, and uncertainty spilled out into this one, single, affectionate gesture, as her hands moved all over Amber's flawless, slender, and curvy body, her fingers running over her with warmth practically radiating from their tips.

Amber giggled softly as the back of Shelley's knees hit the bed, and she pushed her back gently, smirking at her as she came to rest beside Shelley on the bed. She rested on her side, leaning in for another kiss, her fingertips dancing along Shelley's sharp sides. She sighed softly, her hand coming to rest on Shelley's side as their mouths ravaged each other in the type of kiss that only Shelley herself could give Amber. It was the kiss she thought about when Corny's mouth was upon hers, the only kiss she ever really thought about.

"I'm glad you came back," she whispered softly, her eyes meeting Shelley's, as she broke the kiss to catch her breath, her fingers skimming Shelley's sides lightly, "I missed you."

Shelley continued to smirk, especially as her teeth gently bit down on Amber's bottom lip and pulled at it for a few, playful seconds as Amber began to pull away. Combing her manicured fingertips through Amber's silky, blond hair, she kept the other girl as close to her as humanly possible.

"Mm," She concurred, her eyes narrowing slightly. "You, too."

Amber smiled softly at her, her fingers curling against Shelley's side as she placed another deep kiss on Shelley's mouth. She swallowed hard, pulling back, only to gaze at the redhead.

"Do you remember the time we were here," Amber began her voice quiet, "And we were fighting about something, and I found that spot right behind your ear?" She giggled softly, her fingers reaching out to lightly stroke Shelley's hair, "You instantly became putty in my hands."

Shelley huffed softly, a vague smirk still playing on her features.

"Don't act so smug about it, Von Tussle," She purred mischievously, her fingertips brushing against the skin of Amber's arms. "Anyone could've found it," Shelley went on to say, as she pressed her lips against Amber's neck, where she then began to nibble at the skin and kiss her affectionately.

"Yeah," Amber rolled her eyes playfully, "You keep telling yourself that, Shelley." She received the kisses, smirking before raising her head, allowing Shelley to kiss the skin on her neck. She stayed that way for a moment before leaning over slightly, allowing her lips to kiss the previously mentioned place on Shelley's neck. She sighed softly, using her hands to brush Shelley's hair out of her

way.

"You're delicious," she smirked seductively, allowing her body weight to press against Shelley, "You've always been my favorite dessert, Shel."

"Right," She scoffed quietly, and bit her lip at the feeling of Amber's soft lips against her neck. Sighing softly, she ran her tongue over her lips after a moment, and then allowed one of her hands to travel down the length of Amber's side, until it reached her hip. Once there, Shelley drew Amber to her, and then kissed her again, her tongue trailing over Amber's lips before slowly venturing into Amber's mouth to challenge her to a fiery dance of sorts.

Amber moaned softly, returning the kiss, her hands traveling to cup Shelley's face. She had been waiting for this kiss for so long; it had been far too long since she and Shelley had been like this, together in bed, and the knowledge of being in her arms again was almost too much for her to stand.

"Oh, God," Amber pulled back slightly, moaning a little, pressing her forehead against Shelley's, grinning slyly. She worked her fingers into Shelley's, entwining their digits and shifting a little to keep her eyes locked on Shelley's face. She opened her mouth to speak, but her voice wouldn't come. Her tongue darted out to wet her lips, and she swallowed hard, still watching her face.

"Shelleyâ€|" her voice was so quiet that Amber wondered if Shelley had even heard her at first, but she let her fingers stroke the soft skin on the other girl's cheek, "I need to tell you something."

Finally, Shelley felt as though she could let go. With every kiss, touch, and advance that Amber made her on, she returned it, and in full, with absolutely no hesitations. When Amber did, in fact, interrupt the kiss, she moaned softly in protest, but then shared her gaze, her pale eyes resolute. Resting her hand on Amber's hip, she looked into her eyes questioningly.

"What?"

The word was a simple one, but Amber knew that her response would be, quite possibly, the hardest answer she'd ever given. She suddenly regretted saying those words, and wondered if she could ask the other girl to forget the entire conversation, and go back to kissing. She chewed on her bottom lip for a moment, her fingers never straying from Shelley's cheek. She stroked the skin there softly, the hopeful smile slipping from her lips as she studied the redhead's pretty face.

"Shelleyâ€|" she said her name again, her voice breathless now. She clenched her jaw, her eyes suddenly dark and narrow, though more from sheer concentration than anything else. She took a moment to collect herself, closed her eyes, then looked back at Shelley. "I justâ€|" I can't deny it to myself any longer." She blinked, pursing her lips slightly, "I love you."

Throughout the silence, Shelley furrowed her eyebrows once more. She honestly didn't expect much of the answer. She expected Amber to tell her something insignificant, like what a boy said, or what someone

else did, or something of the sort, never in a million years did she even begin to imagine that it would be something like that. As soon as the words left Amber's mouth, Shelley's eyes reopened, and her mouth parted slightly in surprise. She swallowed, her stomach sporting a painful bundle of knots as she forced herself to look at Amber.

Suddenly, she had no idea what to say; and this wasn't just one of those typical loss for words, this was a grave and even life-changing situation for her. With her mind reeling, she pursed her lips, and hurriedly pushed herself up and off the bed. Her eyebrows were still creased against her forehead, and she didn't even bother to glance back at Amber as she snatched her coat, which had been tossed at the foot of the bed during their move, and stood.

"I'll see you," She muttered quietly, her hands visibly shaking as she threw her coat back on in a frenzy of shock and implicit emotions. "whenever," She shrugged her shoulders, evaded the roses on the floor, and promptly left Amber's room. Shelley couldn't believe what she had heard, and the words replayed in her head over and over again, as she tried to shove them aside as though it had never happened. Amber had, for the first time in years, caught her completely and utterly off-guard. Even now, she didn't know what to say. However, even she couldn't deny the definite and piercing pain in her chest. Somehow she felt just leaving Amber there wasn't the appropriate response, but there was nothing she could do about that now.

Amber was more than slightly taken aback by Shelley's sudden departure, and she furrowed her brows, her stomach twisting into knots as she watched her disappear from the room. She rested against the bed for another moment, then scoffed, pushing herself off the bed and into the hallway, catching sight of Shelley just before she descended the stairs.

"Shelley!" Amber's voice was shrill, and she tried not to think about the sudden pain in her heart at the idea of Shelley simply abandoning her after such a heartfelt confession, though there was no time to dwell on that now. Tears burned her eyes, and she furrowed her brows in a desperate attempt to contain her emotion, "Damn! I said" she chewed on her lip for a moment, her voice soft and low, "I said I love you, Shelley."

Shelley had cringed as soon as she heard Amber following after her. Narrowing her eyes again, she kept her back to Amber and listened painfully as she repeated the words back to her. That same pain struck her heart, and she could only glare at the wall in retaliation. Biting the inside of her mouth, she turned sharply around to stare at Amber, a settled look on her face.

"Then, I highly suggest that you stop."

Amber stopped in her tracks, her mouth dropping open as Shelley said those words. She tried not to let the hurt reflect in her eyes, and pursed her lips, furrowing her golden eyebrows at the other girl. Her hands curled into tight fists at her side, and she began to retreat slowly, taking an almost involuntarily step backwards.

To say that her words stung were an understatement; it was undoubtedly the cruelest thing the other girl had ever said to her.

She began to shake her head slowly, still moving away from her.

"Okay," Amber nodded, her voice barely above a whisper, "Okay, fine. Then get the hell out of my house, and don't even think about ever stepping foot back inside. Take your fucking roses, take your damn card, take everything you've ever fucking given me," she stooped to pick up one of the abandoned roses that rested in the doorway of her bedroom, and tore the petals from the flower, letting them drop and crushing them beneath her feet. She narrowed her watery blue eyes back at Shelley, her face flushed pink, though no longer because of her flirtatious mood.

"I would tell you to give me my heart back, but it appears that you've already done an amazing job of breaking it."

Shelley narrowed her eyes spitefully, her lip curling back again slightly.

"Don't be such a goddamn drama queen, Amber," She said contemptibly, her pale eyes glittering with a dash of something that not even Shelley could understand. Her chest was hurting, but she couldn't tell if she was just imagining it, or if it was indeed happening. "Things are getting too complex and blown out of proportion. And you need to stop blaming every little thing that happens in your miserable life on me, because it sure as hell isn't my fault."

In actuality, Amber knew that not everything was Shelley's fault. In fact, more than anything, Shelley was the sole reason she usually convinced herself to get out of bed in the morning. Fighting, or loving, with her was the one thing that kept her going when nothing else did. And still, she couldn't bring herself to tell the redhead that all of the tears she'd cried in the past several months, they were all because of her, in one way or another.

Instead, Amber bit her lip, so hard that she felt the bitter sting, then the hint of blood in her mouth. She nodded twice, her eyes locking on Shelley's face. She had learned the hard way that the only way to prevent herself from crying was to focus on a particular object.

"Fine." Her voice had dropped several decibels, and her mouth was dryer than cotton. "Then get out. And I swear to God, I never want you to come back here again."

Shelley stared at her in silence for a few seconds, and then turned her back to her, her shoulders falling in a careless shrug.

"Good," She began, her voice low, as well. "You don't have to tell me twice," Shelley virtually hissed the words as she started off, down the hall. She just had to get out of Amber's house. It disgusted her to even be here right now. She wasn't sure where she wanted to go: home, the park, some shop downtown, or elsewhere; and, in all honesty, it didn't particularly matter, so long as she didn't have to look at that sorry, stupid look on Amber's face anymore.

Amber stood glaring hatefully at the back of her head as she went, her eyes burning with tears that she simply could not let fall. She had shown her spineless side to Shelley one time too many, and this would be the last. She swallowed hard, curled her fingers into tight

fists, and spun on her heels, stomping her way back into her bedroom. She slammed the door shut, though for what reason, she didn't know. Her mother wouldn't be home for hours, if she even decided to come home at all tonight. Privacy was not an issue in this household; Amber had more privacy than a person could ever desire.

She felt the swell of emotion in the back of her throat before a painful sob tore through her. Her eyes could suddenly take no more, and hot tears began to stain her cheeks. She wiped them away angrily, hating herself for this, especially for the one thing she had vowed never to do; the one thing that made this so much more painful than she could handle.

More than anything, Amber suddenly wanted to destroy something. She needed to be able to physically release her anger, her hurt, her devastation. Her eyes fell immediately upon the card Shelley had given her only a short time ago, and she curled her fingers around the paper. Her heart pounded, and she had every intention of destroying that card, ripping it to pieces just as Shelley had torn her heart.

It took her another moment, but she couldn't bring herself to tear it. Even if it was generic, and signed with only an insincere copy of Shelley's name, it was something. It was more than she would probably ever get again, and this thought forced her to shove the card under her pillow before collapsing on her bed, letting the sobs tear through her body unabashedly.

End
file.